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NEVER FORGOTTEN.

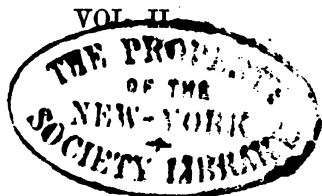
BY

PERCY FITZGERALD, M.A.,

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF STERNE," "BELLA DONNA," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

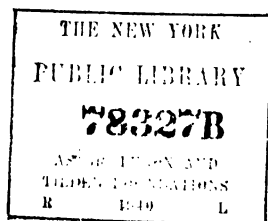
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NEVER FORGOTTEN.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

PRESENTED TO THE FERMOR FAMILY.

NEXT morning he was with the Manuels very early, and with a grave face demanded—though not in terms—a private interview with Violet. “My relations,” he said, “are to be here to-morrow, and desire that you should be presented to them. As I need not impress on you how much depends on the first effect you produce on them, I may recommend you to be very careful how you behave.”

When she heard this terrible news, Violet felt a shock. She had all along anticipated this dreadful

ceremonial, and her little heart fluttered as if she had got a summons to the fashionable Council of Ten. If she had known of that fearful tribunal, she would, perhaps, have preferred it. She felt all "blankness;" her heart sank in, as though Fermor were the governor of the jail come to tell her that she must get ready for her scaffold on the next morning.

"Now," said Fermor, become suddenly like her spiritual adviser, "this is a more serious thing than you would perhaps imagine. Sit down, Violet." And he got her a chair, in which she placed herself, trembling, as if it were a dentist's. "You have not seen so much life," he went on, "and have been brought up differently. *They* have lived and had their being in the highest classes. Fashion is as the air they breathe. Naturally they are nice and critical, and have a different order of associations. They are very curious to see how you will behave, and how you will turn out; and the question is, how *will* you behave? Now give me an idea?"

Violet, who never thought how she would behave before any one in the world, and whose instinct in "acting" was her own simple heart, looked up

wistfully at the dentist standing beside her, and said, sadly, "O, how *can* I? I don't—know."

"O," said he, gravely, "but we must *try* and know. I am sorry to see you don't appreciate how much depends on all this; you do not, indeed, Violet. I am really nervous about it myself; for there is a—a—and I would not say this to you, but for the gravity of the situation—a lightness, if I may call it, in your manner, a sort of rusticity, which I know would jar on persons brought up as they have been. *This* is the rock I dread for you."

Poor Violet! whose voyaging had been a graceful pleasure-yacht in the sun and the smoothest of seas, to hear now of "rocks!" In sore affliction she did not know how to answer.

"Take time," said Fermor, gravely.

"O," she suggested, after a pause, and raising her eyes to him timorously, "I think if I were to be natural, you know—just myself——"

She stopped, for Fermor started back in alarm.

"Good gracious! no! Not for worlds! O, I see, it is very hard to get you to understand. You have not been trained to think, and it is scarcely your fault. I see how it must end. So we must

try and pull through as best we can." And having, as it were, extracted the tooth, with a hopeless air he prepared to go.

Seeing his resignation, and not knowing what to do, she ran to him helplessly. "O," she said, "if you would only tell me—teach me."

"O no," said Fermor, still resigned. "I have never found *that* to do. No, we must trust, as you say, to nature. Only I beg, I entreat—at least no spirits, no violent bursts of laughter. I know it seems bad to tell you this, but it is all for your own good."

Poor Violet! Bursts of laughter before *them*!

Fermor good naturedly made allowance, as for a child, and she saw this idea plainly in his face. He left her miserable; and then the idea of what had since passed out of her head—the "invalid girl"—came back. "She is not a child," she thought, "and can understand his instructions; and he respects her." Then with a weight of worldly trial pressing on her little brain, she went away to her room, and battered on her new-found miseries. This, we may say, on the whole, was the most gloomy day of her little life.

Restless towards evening, she asked her sister

to come and take a walk. From her she received balm, and Gilead was poured abundantly into her wounds. They walked towards Brown's-terrace. Pauline almost laughed as she was told the particular woe of that sick girl. "If you torment yourself in this way, my poor child," she said, "you will fret yourself into a grave. They live next door to him, and a little civility is natural. Besides, he has told you that he has found them out to be low people, and has given them up."

"Yes," said Violet, half convinced, "I suppose so—I suppose he has."

They were entering the terrace, when she drew Pauline back suddenly. "There he is," she said, hurriedly.

"Well," said Pauline, laughing, "we are not afraid to meet him? Ah! you doubting creature, you deserve punishment! Don't you see he is setting out for our house. Come!"

"No—not now—at least, not for a moment."

Fermor was coming out of his house, magnificent as a decorated Apollo Belvidere. He was smoothed, and brushed, and polished, and wore virgin gloves of the most delicate grey in the world; and the delicate grey fingers were closed

delicately upon a packet of yellow-toned pamphlets—new works of the well-known Roger le Garçon school. In his button-hole he had a fresh flower. He passed out of his own gate—looked up the road which led in the Manuel direction—then opened the next gate, went up the steps, and gave a dainty knock as if he were doing “a shake” upon the piano. Pauline, always ready with assuring doctrine, had not a word to say. Not in pale grey gloves, and with a flower at its button-hole, does the charitable Misericordia society visit its sick. Brother Fermor’s “habit” was scarcely spiritual enough.

But they had to think of other things. There was the Day of Execution fixed for the morrow, the awful presentation to the Queen-Mother. Violet, agitated by her new troubles, scarcely slept that night, but tossed and rocked as if she were on the waves of a real ocean. The utter wreck of a night’s rest is not much loss for a young girl; but, looking in the glass, which she did anxiously as soon as she had set foot upon land, she saw red rings round her eyes, and flushed spots upon her cheeks.

The great domed black boxes of “Lady Laura Fermor and suite,” each with a coronet at the hasps,

and wrapped carefully in a canvas paletot, had come down into Eastport, and had been got upstairs into the genteel lodgings. Filtering the suite carefully, a residuum fell to the bottom, and resolved itself into one single maid, who was called Gunter. Gunter was delighted to get home again from what she called "Knees" (but which was spelt "Nice"), and which, as lying in a foreign land, and being in the hands of foreigners, she held, entailed a loss of caste in those who employed her. She professed many times her delight at finding herself home again in "a Christian country."

Fermor had been with them early on the morning of their arrival, and had been encircled by cold arms. He was a little nervous, though he did not acknowledge it to himself; for he was, at least, outnumbered. The girls welcomed him with the artificial blandishments of fashionable affection, and talked to him and put questions as if company were by, and he was Colonel Silvertop, of the Grenadier Guards. They felt that this was acting, and they felt, too, the absurdity of it, but could not help it. Their voices *would* fall into the ball-room cadence.

"We are dying to see her;" they always called Violet *her*. "I am sure she is like Lady Mantower's girl, you used to admire so much." This was Alicia Mary's speech.

"You must make up your minds, my dears, to be frights near her. Even as a boy, Charles, you were the most difficle person in taste. She shall go out with us in Town, all jewels and lace, and the richest dresses. I like those stately queen-like creatures."

"O, mamma, and she can take us to court, and we shall walk behind her, every one asking who that magnificent woman is?"

With his mouth expressing sourness, and some impatience in his tone, Fermor broke in: "I don't understand," he said, "you run on so fast. As for being a stately creature, and that sort of thing, she is a very nice unassuming girl; and as for those fine dresses and drawing-rooms, we shall be too poor to be thinking of such things. I couldn't afford it."

"I hope not," said Lady Laura, gravely. "No plebeian saving and scraping, I hope. Making a handsome show is not so dear a thing after all;

and that ten or fifteen thousand pounds, for we are disputing how much it was you told us——”

“Ten, mamma,” said Blanche.

“What do you all mean?” said Fermor, turning very red. “Who was talking of ten or fifteen thousand pounds? *I* wasn’t. If you mean Violet’s fortune, she has next to nothing; and,” he added, with an attempt at generous emotion, “and thank God she doesn’t require it.”

Lady Laura laughed. “This is quite a new tone for you. Well, be it ten, or nine, or eleven, you must make a show on it if you wish to get on. It *is* very little, my dear Charles; for your father always said you would want plenty of money to keep you alive.”

“But,” said Fermor, bluntly, “we had better understand this once for all. I am not one of your mercenary people. From the first, I said I never would look out for money. In fact, it always seemed to me a—a sort of drawback, a kind of manufacturing thing. What I wanted was a person who would suit me exactly, and I at last succeeded in finding her. Violet, I believe,” he added, looking round with a sort of pride, “will

not have a sixpence of her own—literally, not a sixpence.”

The family looked from one to the other, with blankness mingled with contempt. Fermor saw their glances, and became aggressive.

“You,” he said, “who naturally think the whole of life to be one long ball——”

“Hush!” said Lady Laura, calmly; “don’t reproach *them*. You have not, I hope, let these people take you in? I am sure you are too sensible for that.”

“Who says so?” said Fermor, sharply. “Perhaps that will be the next thing.”

“Well,” said Lady Laura, “you are old enough now, Charles, to know what is best for yourself. I tried to bring you up as well as I could to a certain age. The thing must go on now, and we must make the best of it. What time,” added she, calmly, “are we to see your Miss Manuel?”

“O,” said Fermor, constrainedly, “don’t put yourself out. Any time to-morrow.”

“You said to-day, I thought,” said Lady Laura, coldly, and rising. “Now, my dears, we must get our things settled in this place. We have plenty

to do. We shall be in all to-day, for I feel very tired."

Fermor went home chafing. "What a way they take things!" he said to himself. "Why should they be expecting this and that? I am sure I am old enough now to take my own course." But what really jarred was their resigned air of toleration; for he had expected banners, and bonfires, and acclamations, and general jubilee.

He arrived at Raglan-terrace in no very good humour. "Where is Violet?" he said; "please send her down, as we have no time to lose. Is she ready?"

Violet was up-stairs, but not ready. The final decorations were being pushed forward desperately. Nothing could be found, nothing was put on right or straight; agitated fingers tried to attach portions of dress to poor fluttering Violet's figure. The poor child had been bathing her face for hours, until it became all flustered and inflamed, and she had the wildness that comes from want of sleep. Every moment expresses came from impatient Fermor below. At last she came down.

He started back. "What *have* you been doing

with your face? Good gracious! what is the matter?"

Violet came up to him timorously. "O, it is nothing," she said; "we have been in such a hurry. Let us go."

"But why hurry?" said he. "I thought that all this morning, *surely*—Let me see you in the light. Heavens! Is there no eau-de-Cologne in the house? This is dreadful!"

"Indeed, *indeed*, Charles, I tried all I could. I have been bathing——"

"Ah, that accounts for it," said he, calmly; "you have certainly a judicious sister. And you must not mind if I make another remark—but it is too serious an occasion to stand upon trifles. And that bonnet—*Where* is your little lace bonnet?"

"O," said her sister, standing by her side like a workwoman over a piece of work newly brought home, "this is a new one, just got home expressly;" and she telegraphed a special appeal to Fermor to forbear further criticism.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Come, let us go. We must pull through as well as we can."

They went alone, for Lady Laura had said,

“Please let her come without any of her other people. I am really not equal to it to-day. Later, of course—but please don’t ask me to-day.”

In truth, poor Violet was in the most unfortunate plight for presentation that could be conceived. On this day she had determined to be splendid, and the result was that she looked a thousand times better in her every-day dress.

As they went in, Fermor said, solemnly, himself sadly out of humour, “Please recollect all my instructions. I assure you, though I dare say you don’t see it in that light, you don’t know how much depends upon the next few moments.”

Thus encouraged, Violet entered. Primness and austerity distributed over three persons welcomed her. Lady Laura rose upon her gauntly, and wound her thin cartilages about her. The “girls,” with a set smile and faces cold as china, waited their turn.

“Sit down, pray do,” said Lady Laura, looking curiously into her face. “I am so glad to know you, I am indeed.” The others sat about and looked at her as curiously, taking her dress as their department. In utter confusion, and with Fermor’s eye steadily on her, Violet could only murmur and

murmur a little stupidly, when Lady Laura got out some fashionable platitudes and gave them to her, and then paused, waiting to hear how they would be acknowledged—Violet could only say she was “so kind,” and “so——” an encomium that reached no greater maturity. She heard Fermor change his place in his chair impatiently, then all her small forces fell into complete disorder.

Alicia Mary was busy with that unlucky bonnet, and Violet felt that she was. The conversation languished terribly.

“We must come to know you a little better,” said Lady Laura; “if you have any spare moments, we shall always be delighted to see you. In time, you will have, of course, more confidence in me. Alicia, you will make out Mrs. Manuel’s address; we shall be delighted to leave cards and make her acquaintance.”

Alicia Mary and Blanche and Laura gave her a cold accolade, and said they supposed they should meet her during the season in Town, which they also supposed she found “delightful.”

Violet, in a tone that seemed to deprecate any violence, said she did not know. She was longing to be gone. Fermor abruptly stood up. He was

angry, and saw that the whole had been unsatisfactory; yet, curiously enough, he was not so much angry with Violet as with his relations. "I don't want their patronising airs. I can do in spite of them." And as he walked away he relieved Violet's mind unspeakably, by telling her that she had done fairly, very fairly indeed. He fumed against them all the way home. But the breeze was not able to carry him further than that day.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

SIR HOPKINS EXAMINES THE GROUND.

ON the next morning, excited by a sort of curiosity, he went to see his family again, and said, with an air of unconcern, "Well, how did you find her?" Lady Laura, with an affectation of ingenuity, sent out her daughters on various pretexts. "I did not like," she said, confidentially, "to speak of it before them. It is no use going into the matter now. It does no good. Now, tell me what time are you thinking of for the marriage. We shall, of course, try and meet your views in every possible way."

"O yes," said Fermor, "quite so. But you were satisfied on the whole?"

He saw that Lady Laura was kindly trying to avoid giving her opinion. "Don't be afraid," he said; "tell me candidly. I am not a boy now, you know."

"What is the use?" she said. "*They* were more disappointed than *I* am. I am an old woman now. Seriously, my dear child, as you do ask me, what was over your eyes? I declare I thought I should have dropped when she came in. At first I was sure there was a mistake."

"But," said he, impatiently, "don't you think her pretty? I know here she is considered the belle of the place."

"*Here*," said she, with a half smile. "O, that, of course. After your description and all, I really felt a chill at my heart. No manners, no style of any kind, not able to speak, and as for dress, my dear Charles, I lay it on you to speak seriously to her, for really it is not creditable."

How this criticism, which was in the tone of maternal condolence, affected Captain Fermor, may be conceived. He thought of it a good deal afterwards, and the remark about dress appeared to him specially just. Lady Laura seemed anxious to change the subject, so as not to give him pain.

Sir Hopkins Pocock, she told him, would arrive in a day or so. "Seriously," she said, "you must lay your mind to making way with him. He is wonderfully inclined towards you, and said the other day you had the making of a diplomatist in you. He is to be a governor in a month or so, and I think could be got to take you out with him. He will have splendid appointments in his gift."

Fermor's face lightened. "I always thought," he said, tranquilly, "you should have put me in the diplomatic line. I should have done very well as an attaché. If I *have* a taste, it is for negotiation. I should be very glad indeed to go out with Pocock."

He was, in truth, getting tired of arms and its dull round, which presented no opening for a man of abilities.

"I will speak to him about it," said Lady Laura.

Sir Hopkins arrived the next day, plenipotentiary, as it were, accredited to a new country. He was seen perking down the street with an air of smirking surprise, as who should say, "Really now, this is very forward civilisation; quite surprising, 'pon my word." If he went into a shop, he seemed to go as an embassy to that shop,

and prepared to negotiate a little for the article he wanted, as if he were dealing with the Waipiti tribe. At every turn something—really now—quite took him by surprise. He entered the principal bookseller's shop in the place, and negotiated out of him the leading persons then residing there. The principal bookseller had an inside room where two or three newspapers drifted about, and taking down Sir Hopkins's name with Lady Laura's, became impressed suddenly with respect.

"We are very full indeed now, sir," he said. "Colonel Gouter was in here this morning, and said he never recollected such a season. The bishop came only yesterday."

Sir Hopkins was surprised. "No, really? You don't tell me so? Now, what bishop? It cannot be the Bishop—of—er——?"

"Yes, sir. Doctor Bridles. We have got his lordship's 'Charge,' which has made such a sensation. Got down six copies last week, and only one left."

Sir Hopkins was smilingly amazed. And so this was the "Charge," really now? That *was* curious. Well, and who else, now?

"We never were so full. The Miss Campbells,

and the officers, and Major Carter, who gave the little parties."

"Carter! Carter!" said Sir Hopkins. "What! Not an elderly man, with light clean face, and greyish whiskers? No. I should say not?"

"Why yes, sir," said the leading bookseller, a little mystified by this way of putting the thing. "Why, that *is* very like him. It must be the same. He has been in the best society, I assure you, sir. A great friend of Captain Fermor's, sir."

"O! That is very nice indeed. Come now. A great friend," said Sir Hopkins, setting his head on one side, and resting his hands on the rail of a chair, as if it were his perch, and he were about to drink.

"O yes. In fact, sir, they *say* that it was at his house that Captain Fermor's marriage came about. Is it not interesting, sir?"

Then Sir Hopkins, having bought half a quire of note-paper, and not having subscribed to the lonely lee coast where the wrecked newspapers were drifting about, went his way pleasantly. This was what he called getting the lie of the ground.

Fermor thought a good deal over what Lady Laura had hinted. It diverted him, too, from other unpleasant reflections. "Really," he said to himself, "I begin to think Violet is only a toy—a very pretty toy—and she seems scarcely to think life can be a business at all." But he was pleased with the notion of the diplomatic opening. "The very thing for me," he said. "He is most likely of the old-fashioned school, and I will go out with him as secretary nominally—in reality as adviser and minister."

Major Carter, he felt, had a sort of little bill against him, and he thought he would settle it by a dinner at the mess. "No man shall say I am in his books," Captain Fermor added, sternly; and Major Carter came to dinner that very day.

Mess dinners repeat themselves; hundreds of impressions can be taken from the one mould. The mess dinner, the mess plate, the mess waiters, waiting as if on parade, the mess diners, and, above all, the mess itself, are all according to a "sealed pattern," and turn up in every corner of the empire, as undistinguishable as one regimental button from another. Major Carter, as crisp and short as thin Scotch cake, bathed

pleasantly in these scarlet waters. He paddled conversationally among them, adapted himself to the "young fellows," and was pronounced, with serious military gravity, to be a man of "uncommon knowledge." Wise Folly, busy with its pipe, shook its head with profundity at Wise Folly in the opposite lounging-chair, and uttered thickly that Carter was a man that had read a good deal. A stranger is always welcome; for they had gone round and round over the dried-up patch of grass they called their "minds," until they knew every foot of it by heart. The wells, in which there was such brackish talk as horses, uniforms, "my setter pup," and "jolly" cigars, had long been pumped dry. Heads turned eagerly to drink up the clear brook of Carter talk. And yet he was insinuating and deferential, and with skilful tact suffered Fermor to lead.

After dinner there came the little ante-room, the playground, where the youths could disport with tobacco and strong drinks. A few got out the card-table, and applied themselves painfully to the serious game of whist. Major Carter shook his head sadly as he was asked to take a hand. "No, no," he said. "What I know of whist was

bought a little expensively. A very pretty corner of Carterstown had to pay for bad play. After that night I gave up. Ask General Munro (then Colonel Munro—he was there the whole night) if I did not bear it pretty well.” There being now a promiscuous distribution of cigars, Major Carter giving in on one point, said, good humouredly, “Come, I tell you what, I will take a cigar. Thanks.” When the cigars were lit all round, and the room seemed glowing like a coal country at night, Major Carter got very pleasant, and began to unpack some of the little worldly wares he had gathered up in his journey through life. He set before them ghostly dinner-parties, ghostly balls, little domestic farces, in which Sandwich, Lord Yokel’s brother, who was humorously called by his friends Lobster Sandwich, from the colour of his face, figured. General—then Colonel—Munro also had part in these recollections. More interesting, however, was it when Major Carter brought upon the scene a certain Maltese lady whom he had met in garrison, “really one of the finest creatures in the Italian way” he ever encountered in the whole course of his life. “For myself,” continued Major Carter, “I am not very much in

that line; and men tell me such and such women are handsome, and of course I take their word for it. But really, when I saw this girl coming down the Strada Reale, literally lighting up the pathway, I confess I did feel ever so little curious about her."

The youths settled themselves to listen earnestly—for at least the very youngest, not eighteen, might speak judicially on this subject—when a mess waiter entered with a card in his hand, and said to Fermor, "That gentleman wishes to see you."

"Who can want me at this time? 'Sir Hopkins Pocock!' O!" Fermor added, aloud, and rose to go out. He therefore did not see the curious effect of this name on his friend. Major Carter gave a scared look round from one to the other, and half rose also.

"Well," said a Boy-officer, breathless, "what did she do then?"

"Why then——" Major Carter said, abstractedly: "I fear I must go now. Good gracious! Had no idea—so late."

A tumult of protest. "O, hang it. Confound it! Tell us about the woman."

"Must go, indeed," said Major Carter, looking

uneasily at the door. Letters, you know. Good night—*good night*.” Quite a sudden thought.

Meanwhile Fermor was greeted warmly by his relation. “Just been up at your lodgings. Followed you down here. Don’t know that I should know you, though.”

“You must come in, my dear sir,” said Fermor, with warmth; “we are just sitting after dinner. I asked a friend, Major Carter.”

“Carter—Major Carter. Is he here?”

“O yes,” said Fermor. “A sharp clever man of the world. You are certain to like him.”

“Am sure he is the same—met him at Monaco. And a friend of yours? Come, I *will* go in and sit down for a few minutes.”

As they entered, they brushed by the major, who was hurrying out, with his hat half way raised, as it were to catch a train.

“Good gracious! where are you going?” said Fermor, catching him by the arm.

“I *must* go,” said the major, in a low whisper, still bent upon catching his train. “Please let me—business.” Curiously, too, he spoke with his face to the wall, and turned away from Fermor.

“Major Carter, Major Carter!” said the diplo-

matist, with undiplomatic heartiness, "we have met before. You recollect *me*—Pocock? So glad. So *very* glad." And the diplomatic head was jerked on one side, and the diplomatic hand held out.

Major Carter slowly took a sort of under-look at him, much as a dog does suspicious of his master, and instantly changing into the former crisp Major Carter that was sitting telling of the Maltese lady, became delighted to welcome an old acquaintance met with at Monaco.

"Sir Hopkins Pocock," said Fermor, introducing him to the company. "Major Dobbs, Mr. Slack, Captain Showers."

The hospitality of a cigar was promptly offered, and several open cases were proffered. Sir Hopkins chose one carefully, and smiled on all round in return. His talk flowed on them steadily in its thin stream; he never was at a loss, but to Major Carter he was specially attentive; appealing to him, and listening to him when he had appealed, almost with reverence. "Stay long at Monaco after I left? We had a very pleasant time of it. Recollect old Grimani from Naples, when he tore up my *Times*? They said he had lost fifty thousand francs that night."

And Major Carter, who had not seemed to recollect him well at first, and whose imaginary train had long since started, now became as an old friend of the liveliest memory, and a very delightful and genial old friend.

Fermor was pleased. "I always knew," he said sagely, next day, "that Carter was of the proper set; I can always tell by the ring of the metal." He was pleased; too, with his new relation. "Just the sort of man I required," he said; and presently had drawn him out of the crowd, now beginning to bet upon the whist party, and was talking to him gravely.

"They told me, sir," he said, "of your promotion. I am very glad of it. It requires peculiar gifts to govern. If you were thinking—as they told me you were—of taking with you any man of a peculiar turn that way, as secretary, or that sort of thing, I confess I should be very glad to go. You can understand that a man, who feels himself made for better things, and with ambition, must find himself rather thrown away in this sort of thing;" and he glanced round the room.

"O, of course," said the diplomatist; "quite so. And so you find this place dull? It seems to

me pleasant enough. I rather envy you here. Do they ever give a ball or a dinner, eh?"

"O, I suppose so," said Fermor, carelessly. "I don't know, really. I am the worst person in the world to apply to. But, sir—of course, if you have chosen any one already, that is a different thing. But I *think* I could be of use; in fact, I am sure of it. Better, perhaps, than any one else."

"Ah, quite so," said the other; "no doubt. And the men here, how do you find them now? Pleasant, I should say, for mere daily use—like roast leg of mutton, not a refined dish, but we have to come back to it."

"But *have* you made up your mind, sir," said Fermor, keeping to his point, "if I might ask you directly?"

"Do you know," said Sir Hopkins, turning round on him, "you remind me of the chief who was our stiffest card in the Waipiti. All our diplomatic forms were thrown away on him. Well, no. My good Charles—we will talk of this to-morrow."

Fermor, fretting at this cool reception of his proposals, which he always liked to be as promptly received as they were offered, said ironically, "You

have to make the acquaintance of these men here, as yet, sir."

"No, no," said the diplomatist, smiling. "I have read a good many more men than I have books. For instance, that sunburnt man opposite, who made that comic remark about the halter of a horse."

Fermor smiled with compassion. "He never gets out of a circle much larger than a halter," he said. "Showers is his name. He is our professional jester!"

"Showers? Showers? I knew a Colonel Showers who commanded out in the islands, and headed the attack on the Pah."

"My uncle, sir," said Showers, striking in; "he was out there many years."

"Good gracious!" said the diplomatist, drawing his chair over to him, "how curious, how wonderful! He was my great friend—often dined with me at Government House. How is he? Heard from him?"

The diplomatist was so delighted at this discovery, that he addicted himself to Showers for the rest of the night. Showers, elated by the proud distinction, grew, as it were, rampant in his ardour,

and threw out on all sides his fescennine jests, as they would be called in the old Roman History, being reckless enough, even, to level a shaft or two at the Fermor Jove. But the face of the Fermor Jove wore an expression of deep pain and disgust, as he saw this strange preference. Later, something like this thought passed through his mind: "That the destinies of thousands of our fellow-creatures should be committed to a man who was so ignorant in reading the human mind! Surprising blindness!" It made him sad.

Late that night they set out to walk home together. Major Carter and Fermor, with the diplomatist in the middle. At Fermor's gate they said good night, and Fermor went in. But he heard Sir Hopkins say in his cheeriest diapason, "My dear Carter, give me your arm! Which way do *you* go? I want to have a talk with you over old times."

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

SIR HOPKINS'S VERDICT.

FERMOR was beginning to grow sour and pettish at the restive course his life was taking. He felt towards it much as he had done towards a shying and kicking horse that he once rode. He was annoyed, and he disliked being annoyed, he said. This road was getting rough, and he preferred walking on the grass. Perhaps he was piqued that every lady was not in a tumult of delight, astonishment, or envy, at what he had done.

In this train of mind, and eager to give a little premium for such good conduct, he again set the decorators at work, put together the new "Hachettes," and went in to call at his next door

neighbour's. He wanted a little soothing, too; and often a successful visit, he said, was a glass of anisette to a Frenchman.

The girl's eyes sparkled as he entered, and she half rose. The colour came to her cheeks. "Even in her dress," thought he, "the Fahrenheit of gentility—quite the lady." Her eye fell on M. Hachette's little volumes. "*I* know," said he, "from experience, how welcome a new book is to the convalescent. Of course it is easy for any one to say: 'Write to that man in London, and tell him to send a box of the newest things.' And you *do* get," added he, smiling, "the very newest—trash. No; I think I know your taste and the tone of your mind."

"It is so kind of you," she said, eagerly turning them over.

"I got them expressly," he said, "and I have good news. Our friend Roger le Garçon is on his way. We shall have him next week."

"Next week!" said the girl. "You are too good to me. Papa says what shall I do when I lose our neighbour? I must only make the most of the time."

"O," said Fermor, smiling, and thinking of the

metaphor he had written to Mrs. Fazakerly—his were always good serviceable images that would wash and wear—"you are thinking of the approaching dissolution, the lying in state, and the interment. A time is appointed for all men. But it is a good way off. The judge has given me a long day."

This was a very natural girl, and she said more with her open honest face than with her voice, "O, I am so glad."

Fermor looked at her with great interest. He was now going to take his anisette. "So you are sorry for the poor convict?" he said.

The other looked down. "It is mere selfishness, I am afraid," she said. "You will say we miss what has been a comfort and assistance to us, and—you have been very, *very* kind."

She said this in a straightforward way, without any affectation. At that moment it occurred to him how helplessly that poor little Violet would have floundered, and what a spectacle of confusion she would have exhibited.

"I hope," he said, graciously, "we do not give up all our friends when we marry. It would be very hard if we were to lose our caste like the In-

dians, and be cut off from society. I shall be the same Captain Fermor, I hope. I sincerely trust so. But, as I say, the thing is altogether indefinite. That is to say, I never like being fixed to a day, or a month, or even a year. In matter of time I am always a despot. They must give me breathing space and opportunity to look about. And so," he said, smiling encouragement, and morally smoothing her hair, "we can hope to spend a great many more hours together over Roger le Garçon yet."

He was greatly delighted with her confidence in him, and the naïveté of her almost unconcealed liking, which he thought he would play on a little more still.

"I would give the world to see her," she said, fixing her soft, honest eyes on him. "When I am strong enough to drive out, which will be tomorrow, I shall get papa to take me where she is walking. I can look at her hard, without being rude."

Fermor good naturedly passed over the false expression in this speech, for he might have told her it would be rudeness all the same; then said, "Why not see her in the regular way? I tell you what, Violet shall come and see *you*."

"No, no," said she, eagerly, and colouring.
"Not for the world."

"And why not?" said Fermor, still watching her.

"Violet!" she said. "O, what a charming name! And I am *sure* suits her."

"Yes," he said, carelessly, "it does. I confess I rather fancy a name of a more neutral tint. You expect everything to be in harmony—to be shrinking like a violet."

"And I am *sure* she shrinks. Tell me, now."

"Yes," said Fermor, laughing. "She does—almost a little too much. I almost like *your* name—Mary—better."

"O no, no," said she, in some confusion. "You only *say* that."

"I speak of the name in general," said he, gravely.

This sort of discussion is a little dangerous. So it would have been with any one less trained than Fermor, who felt he had the reins of the situation well in hand. He was thinking how much nearer the edge he could drive, when the door half opened, and a sort of little sharp voice said persuasively,

“ May I come in ? Eh ? ”

The face of Sir Hopkins was looking round the edge of the door, as if he had his eye to a telescope.

“ My dear Charles, you here ! Just dropped in to see Mr. Carlay. Carter was to have met me. Miss Carlay, I am sure. Charles, I must ask you—— ”

The other was really taken aback. What brought him ; above all, what brought him at such a moment, when the suspended lectures on Roger le Garçon were about beginning. But, true to his principle of never being surprised, never thrown off his centre, Fermor introduced his relation at once.

The delicate girl received the visitor with perfect self-possession. No shell had exploded in *that* drawing-room. There had been nothing like an order for execution. She went to meet him with a smile and with a welcome, said she was sorry her father was out, and seemed not in the least embarrassed at having to play the conversational game against two gentlemen. She uttered the usual hopes and questions. Was Sir Hopkins going to stay with them long, and how did he like the place ?

Immensely, Sir Hopkins said. Did not know when he had liked a place so much. Though, indeed, to a man who had roughed it a good deal in the world, all places should be like all beds—very much the same.

“Indeed,” said the young girl, half shyly, half earnestly, and with an animation that became her wonderfully, “our little ways and manners must seem very trifling to *you*, who have travelled so many, *many* miles, and have managed those dreadfully savage people. I would give the world to know how it is done,” she added, the shyness being now all absorbed in the earnestness, “and how even a beginning is made.”

(This was not the venial hypocrisy of the drawing-room, for Fermor had indeed invested his relation's achievements with an air of adventure.)

“Why, you don't tell me,” Sir Hopkins said, in great delight, “that you have been reading up the Blue Books? Where did you pick up about the Waipiti?”

Fermor and Sir Hopkins went away together. Pretty much the same feeling was in both minds. “My dear boy,” said the latter, detaining him gently at the library door, “we older fellows may

not have as fresh a taste, but I fancy I know a girl about as well as you know a horse. And, positively, if I had to choose between our good little innocent rustic and *that* girl, I declare——” And he finished the sentence in an expressive squeeze of his lips. “To say nothing,” he added, in a lower voice, “of the money. Ha! ha! I suppose I am getting old and exploded—though the F. O., I am glad to say, does not think so—but of all the incomprehensible bewildering things in the world this selection of yours—of our amiable little rustic——”

With another man Fermor would have burst out haughtily, “Incomprehensible to *you*—that is *your* concern.” And he would have dashed in his face Burke’s “As well might a rabbit understand the gestation of an elephant,” like a glass of wine. But he restrained himself. This relation was to be dealt with by suasion. “You are never tired, sir, of this unfortunate subject,” he said. “I am truly grieved, indeed I am, that——”

“Now, *now*,” said Sir Hopkins, “why *will* you? I never succeed in conveying myself. Though *you* know, we are trained *not* to convey ourselves. But

‘it intrigues’ me, as old Mungo used to say in his dinged French. I don’t see it. I *want* to see it. Here are you in a whole parkful of desirable girls, every field here alive with them—money, rank, everything—and you pick out our little rustic. My boy, I tell you this, you have a game. Don’t tell me.”

Fretful, pettish, hot, wounded (if he had been a girl he would have cried), angry, Fermor did not know how to answer, could not answer. His enemy would have laughed to see his irresolute confusion.

“It is *so* odd,” continued Sir Hopkins. “But I shall find it out, depend upon it. It quite piques me. When I was an attaché they used to call me ‘Young Tally,’ a funny abbreviation, you know, of the great diplomatist. First, that fine girl the sister—and now, *this* fine girl. Ah! deep, deep fellow!”

Later that evening he met Major Carter.

“By the way,” said the major, “could you tell me what is Mr. Showers’s attraction for Sir Hopkins? Most mysterious and incomprehensible!”

“Why do you ask *me*?” said Fermor, opening his eyes with resignation. “As well ask me about

the magnet, or the tides. What is the attraction about the little arts of flatteries and meannesses and sycophancies, daubed on in coarse vulgar streaks? *That* is a pretty old story, I believe."

The major elevated his eyes in such intelligence and surprise, that the creases of his forehead seemed to fall into the shape of notes of interrogation.

"Of course," said Fermor, "Sir Hopkins sees through it, but we all—the wisest of us—cannot find it pleasant or amusing."

Major Carter, quite overpowered by these wonderful revelations (explaining a mystery that had bewildered him for years), could only write more large-text interrogations on his forehead.

"What can you expect?" said Fermor, half in remonstrance. "Do you know what his father is?—a gutta-percha maker in Cockspur-street—air cushions, indestructible toys, and that sort of thing. Would you believe it! But I know it."

If Showers had been the newly revealed author of a murder, or an escaped convict, greater horror could not have been shown in the other's face. "God bless me! You don't tell me so! Gutta-percha toys! Well! well! after that——"

"Well," said Fermor, "what of that? I am pretty well accustomed to *that* sort of thing. But in the army, it seems, all the third-class passengers travel first-class."

"Ha, ha! un-com-monly good," said Major Carter. "Pray forgive me for telling you so. But you say those things so quietly. Another man would keep them for a dinner and a large audience. I must tell that to Miss Manuel, *my* friend. It will make her laugh."

"*Your* friend?" said Fermor, lifting his eyebrows with some scorn. "Ah! that is good!"

Major Carter, getting on a wrong tack, thought that Fermor was about to resent this familiar tone, and had mistaken it for Violet. He added, hastily, "I mean Miss Pauline, *my* 'friend.' You can't conceive how confidential we are. She tolerates me more than any one."

Fermor surveyed him with an amused air. He was delighted to be behind the scenes. "*Your* friend? Ha, ha! Very good!"

Major Carter *now* saw his way.

"You think I am going to make an old fool of myself. Not at all. I know the world too well, I assure you."

"So it appears," said Fermor, with what he would have called "a sneer and water." He had a short struggle—for he thought of the recent compliment—but it was impossible to resist. Besides, it would not be "loyal." "Seriously, Carter, you should give up that idea. It is only charitable to tell you so. You might be talking of it to other men; and indeed any one else would *not* tell you. But I think it a sort of duty."

"About what?" said the major, seriously taken aback. "God bless me!"

"About Miss Pauline, as you call her. I think it loyal to warn you. As a friend, I advise you not to be boasting of her friendship. She is a dashing clever woman, far too clever for me. Some people admire her."

"So—I perceive," said the major, colouring; "she has been——"

"Exactly," said Fermor, smiling. "You are a man of the world, and can bear the truth. But the fact is, she does *not* like you. In fact, worse than that—which is a good joke—suspects you!"

For the first time for years a genuine colour flooded the major's cheeks. "Suspects me? What do you—what does *she* mean?"

"Ah, that's for her," continued Fermor, gaily. "She says you are dangerous, too. Talks about hunting up the old Army Lists. 'Pon my word, I forget half all she said."

The major saw the joke, and smiled over it, and murmured his appreciation of it,—which, however, was unintelligible.

Fermor went his way whistling, and really in good humour again.

Major Carter went *his* way, thinking over "the joke," which, perhaps, as he said, he would not forget.

Sir Hopkins came to Fermor next day almost chuckling.

"This place," he said, "is getting quite exciting. It is really a fine training-ground. I thought my diplomatic joints and muscles would get stiff and rusty for want of practice. But I find I have plenty to do. My dear friend, I have managed our little affair. Would you believe *that*? And all in a day!"

Fermor became good humoured at once. "I am so glad, sir. It is *so* good of you."

"I mean about our young friend Showers. He's a lad of good spirit, and should be encouraged."

Fermor's face began to contract, and shrink like metal cooling. "I am quite tired of him," said he, impatiently. "And I think, sir, when you come to know him better, so will you be. Why, there's nothing in him; nothing. Of all the empty, self-sufficient wind-bags, without an idea beyond a horse, and the horse-laugh——"

Sir Hopkins shook his head from side to side with great enjoyment. "Ah, I dare say you're right," he said. "We have all our fancies. Luckily for him, everybody does not take your view. Seriously, my dear fellow, I think he has made a good impression on those people—on the good-natured daughter. I am glad, *very* glad, of it, for the sake of my old friend Showers. We were like brothers."

"What! he has made a conquest, has he?" said Fermor, with bitter scorn. "Come, that is quite a new line. For my part, I am surprised at nothing now-a-days. I suppose it is all quite right."

Sir Hopkins looked at him still with an amused air. "And, *à propos*," he said, "how is our little rustic to-day? She is such a charming bit

of natural gaucherie. Because, observe, I distinguish, she is not one of your peasants let loose in a drawing-room. I *must* say she is all nature. And her fine sister. Ah! I never shall let *that* subject go, never, you military owl, you. Master Charles, if *I* had been at your elbow when you were choosing! I declare to you, Charles, on—my—so-lemn word of honour” (Sir Hopkins put little jerks between each word), “if I were ten years younger, I would go to her within the next half hour, and offer her the vacancy in my house. What a pair we should be! What a governor’s wife she would be! We would rule the colonies. What was the reason, eh, Charles? I think you were a little in awe of her, eh? I have very sharp eyes. I remark she has a quiet, decisive manner about her, which (naturally enough) *you* would not relish. Only for her, how would it have turned out, *I* should like to know? Clever, clever woman, that! I admire her.”

“I assure you, sir,” said Fermor, excitedly, “in *that* view you are quite astray.”

“Perhaps so,” said Sir Hopkins, carelessly, “perhaps so. But a word of advice, Charles.

Don't have the look of being directed by any whole family—I say the look ; because, whether you are or not, is quite a matter for your own concern. I see the beginnings—it may be all fancy—and my advice is worth something.”

How Fermor fumed and glowed out of Sir Hopkins's presence may be imagined by those who know him even a little.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

THE EASTPORT SHOW.

SOME intelligent and influential persons living about Eastport and its dependencies had long been thinking that the only way to crown, as it were, its growing commercial importance, was to hold a cattle festival, or congress.

You had a great grazing country close by, said Lord Porkchester, the local lord, in a tone of remonstrance. You had a great carrying trade with the opposite coast; you had a convenient place of export; you were within half a day's travel of one of the great markets of the empire; you had pasture land unrivalled in Europe for richness; you had an intelligent population, with more or less proportion

of that creditable "bone and sinew" which made the State—you had, in short, every element suitable for mixing in a cattle show. Lord Porkchester "looked around" him at a preliminary meeting held at the hotel, and saw all these things. Nature in that part of the world, it would seem, was rising up, and clamorously appealing for a cattle show.

In good time the Eastport walls flamed with crimson carbuncles of advertisements, and broke out into a healthy eruption of posters. The committee, with Lord Porkchester in the chair, sat daily. Its sub-divisions, the dinner committee, the reception committee, and the ball committee, sat daily also. By-and-by a bit of waste ground became strewn with planks and timbers, as if a hundred Indiamen had been wrecked and gone to pieces there; and lengths of very raw deal shedding began to spread out, as if they were unrolled from a reel. By-and-by, too, engines that seemed like racks and enlarged thumbikens, were seen reclining awkwardly on the quay, sprawling like metal tortoises, and unable to get up. These were the famous "mowers," the more famous "winnowing machines," and, above all, the wonderful

patent "bone crushing machine," which title did indeed, in the minds of serious and religious elderly ladies, seem to support the "rack" theory. No wonder that the Eastport local paper reminded its public that the "eyes of the empire" were watching it.

Later on the show animals began to arrive. Precious beasts, hidden away in their own fat, and covered up in clothes, were seen reeling and tottering through the street, led by rings fixed in the sensitive part of the nostrils. At corners they would halt and give out deep and piteous protests. One or two, full of heat and foam, and blowing off steam like a locomotive, lay down with all their fine clothes in the mire, and looked round with deeply injured eyes. But no one had yet seen Bullington's noble white cow, "Milky Jane," who had taken prizes in every county, and who might have been hung all over with cups like a French lemonade-seller. She travelled down in a van of her own—first class—resided at the best hotels of her tribe, and arrived under cover of night. Through the bars of small railed carts could be seen something like blinking corpulent old gentle-

men, who had dined well, and drunk very well, and who were drowsy and stertorous. These proved to be competing pigs.

It was quite a provincial festival. There were judges, and stewards, and committees, and heavy agricultural men, a little higher in intelligence than the other animals which were exhibited. Everybody came. Other ribbons fluttered in the air besides those of committee-men and judges; and all the ladies of the district seemed to be filtered through the place, who courageously picked their steps through the lanes and alleys of the yard. And the band of Captain Fermor's regiment, led by Herr Sangmann, a saffron-coloured German, played waltzes and overtures, after the rude rough fashion of British regimental music—stiff and painful as the stocks the men wear, noisy yet thin, shrieking and ear-piercing, yet unsustained. Ladies were led round to have audiences of the prize animals in their cabinets. The visitors saw tails waving sadly, like pendulums, and glowering and reproachful eyes measuring them; they saw, too, what seemed monstrous breastworks and ramparts of flesh and fat. Gentle voices were attuned to cadences of wonder and delight, and

curiosity; though the air was heavy, and dresses had to be gathered up carefully, and there was an embroidery of straw to every petticoat; but there was young Mangel, and Harry Wurzel, with other charming showmen (whose regular residence was in the saddle), who went round with them, and put the thing in so attractive a light (like Professor Faraday lecturing), that this avidity for bucolic knowledge became natural.

"Milky Jane" attracted the largest crowd. She was all pure white, with pale pink nostrils and "lovely horns" (a casual burst of ecstasy from one of the ladies), and every now and then she turned her head round to look, with a dreamy complacent expression of perfect happiness. Man of the world or diplomatist might vainly hope for that perfection of ease and unaffected absence of restraint before company which "Milky Jane" exhibited.

A poultry show was part of the sight. Some one had put a question about a week before, specially addressed to no one, "Why not have a poultry show?" And no one being prepared with an answer, this feature was resolved upon. Ladies in the neighbourhood, who had long nurtured

mysterious-looking birds, sent them in ; and rare specimens of the Dorking and Cochin families strained over each other's shoulders with jerks and starts, and looked out through their wire netting like inflamed and apoplectic retired colonels in the bay-window of a club.

Captain Cadby led round the Miss Campbells. They were enraptured with Captain Cadby's band. With the ingenuousness of girlhood, the younger said she could listen to it "for ever!" In those raptures she almost hinted that the music of an after state *must* be of the pattern of Captain Cadby's band. With more pointedness the elder insinuated that this celestial perfection was owing to Captain Cadby himself.

"Yes," said that officer ; "we pay him well, that's the secret. And I blow up Sangmann—that's the way, too. You see, I sometimes go down and hear them practise. I make Sangmann keep up the pace, you see. They take everything too slow. Ever hear the 'Pop goes the Weazel Galop?' No! O, hang it, you *must* hear that. I'll make Sangmann play it. Do you know," added Captain Cadby, modestly, "it was I that made him set it. I do believe there's more

genuine music in that air—though common fellows wouldn't see it—than in all the music of the great swells, and what-d'ye-call-'em Mozarts, they puff off so."

The girls looked at each other in speechless delight. They knew he was musical—they always had said it.

Well, he was as musical as most fellows. He would tell them what—he knew what was good, and what was bad. O, had they seen his new "Snaffle?"

No! Delight, rapture, wonderment, all struggling together. What! a snaffle, a real snaffle?

"'Be sure! I say, come along. This way."

This way was through a little bog, over which the officer tramped gaily, in very stout boots. The girls were prettily shod in pale cloth boots, the colour of their dresses. "I say, look at my boots! I don't care how muddy it is! I'm all right." The girls had served in the ranks, and were true drawing-room Spartans. They never faltered, and walked on bravely.

The snaffle might have been a diamond necklace, it caused such delight and surprise. The sisters struggled for it. They seemed to be in the enjoyment of the beatific vision. Such ingenuity,

skill, and incredible talent. But had he thought of a name for it, the elder said, with a sigh—some pretty lady's pretty name? He should call it the Alexandra or the Carlotta Snaffle.

“O, said Captain Cadby, in an off-hand way, “that is settled long ago. I call it the ‘Jenny,’ after a pretty girl in the north of England I am desperately gone with. You’ve nobody here to match her. I could tell you a long history about *her*.”

Something like the breath of an east wind seemed to pass across the Campbell faces, but they were well disciplined, and were as eager about the girl in the north, and “laid on” as much surprise, joy, interest, and other varied emotions, as they had done for the “snaffle.”

The next night there was to be the ball. This was to be given by the united regiments. The soldier organises the best ball in the world, because he does not spare money. The public rooms were taken. A ball committee for “advice and decoration” was formed. Major Stagg, who had hung his rooms with some dreadfully rhubarb-looking horses, and who had a rude facility in sketching yachts, was put in the chair as representing Art in

the regiment. A couple of guns were dragged in and hung about with flags and evergreens; muskets were grouped in a star on the wall, and the whole christened a "trophy." The bare walls were draped with pink and white calico. Fermor was of the committee of advice and decoration, and was for "getting down" some one from the Messrs. Tabaret, but a cabal, secretly prompted, it was believed, by "that low fellow" Showers, received his proposition so offensively, that he withdrew from the board altogether. "Don't ask *me* about their proceedings," he said; "I know nothing about them. I have washed my hands of the whole business. Let us wait and see what will come of it."

It was the great day of the great night. Lady Laura with her three daughters, with the versatility of French soldiers—who carry their cooking-pans and tentes d'abris on their backs, and can adapt themselves to all camping quarters—were beginning to find that Eastport was not altogether barren. This hard working family were as the Irish reapers, who come over and find work waiting them in all places. And thus, as she had

entered ball-rooms heading her little procession at Nice, at London, at Brussels, and at the county town (during the races), so now she was entering this Eastport room, presenting a white smile to her hosts. That smile was as well worn as her passport.

Fermor found her, on the morning of the ball, as it were in a drain, up to her waist in water, plying the shovel. "Violet," he said, moodily, "Violet of course goes with you? What time can you call for her?"

Lady Laura jumped out of her trench. "I have not heard of that arrangement," she said. "I did not know she was going."

"It is only the right thing," said Fermor. "I suppose she must be brought out properly. At what hour, then?"

"Why, my dear Charles," said Lady Laura, retiring, with her neck at an angle to get a better view of a dress, "to tell you the truth, I should be glad to do anything for you and your future wife, but really the thing is getting so troublesome, and there is so much diplomatic work and care about what we are to say, that really I don't understand it. That is the truth. One day she is sick, and I

take her to be offended or hurt at something; another day she is hurt at something, and she turns out to be sick."

"You must consider she is a child," said Fermor, coldly, "and make allowance."

"Ah, that's just it," said she, shaking out the folds of the dress, and retiring again to get a good view. "I am too old, Charles, to begin studying children. I expect to be studied myself a little now. I have my own girls to look to, and perhaps not much time to do that in. To speak plainly to you, Charles," she added, laying a strip of ribbon down the dress to see the effect, "if you had married an heiress, or some one of rank, you would have a right to expect this sort of thing from us. But for a little girl of *that* kind, you could hardly expect us to put ourselves out of the way. I am sure we shall get on very well after. Because, of course, you have done what is right and proper. But I have a duty to my girls, Charles. There, Charles, the milliner of this place—a wretched creature, without two ideas—is waiting, and I have literally to teach her everything."

Fermor departed without a word. He was too proud to explain. He told Violet she must go

with her brother and sister. In these visits, of late, he had come very moody and distrait. There was uncertainty and flutter in gentle hearts when he came. He was under a sense of injury, specially as regards Pauline, who had attempted to control him. She said, in her natural way, when he told of the new arrangement, "How strange! how odd!"

Fermor looked at her suspiciously. "How strange, or how odd, pray?" he said, with hostility. "My mother, Lady Laura, has her daughters to look after. At her time of life, it is rather too much to expect that she can adapt herself to our little whims and changes." (This protest Fermor had adapted from his mother's speech.)

Pauline was looking at him with calm wonder, and a sad gaze that seemed to "bring him to account"—a manner that was disagreeable to him.

"Surely," he said, a little warmly, "you have your sister and your brother! I have tickets for you all. Good gracious! Let us not make difficulties out of these little trifles."

"O yes, yes, yes," said Violet, hurriedly. "To be sure. Charles is quite right. I can go *any* way."

Fermor smiled grimly. "Scarcely," he said. "I shall not be able to go with you myself, having to be at the rooms. But I shall be at the door to meet you. Don't be late. Pray don't."

He went away beating the steps of the stair with his cane. He was dissatisfied with all things. "Everybody is making a fuss," he said, fuming. Violet, when the door closed, gave a piteous look over at her sister, and then her head drooped. Actually, a faint little line of care was coming on her cheek. The sister went over to her.

"He is worried," she said, "darling, with business. He is getting his affairs into order, which *must* be done before men marry. And, darling, he is—so fond of you. I saw the way he looked over at you."

A wave of colour drifted softly across Violet's cheeks, and washed out that little line of care.

"You think so," she said, in delight. "Do you know, I am such a baby. I fancied he was a little cross with me."

CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

THE BALL—ELEVEN TILL ONE.

NOW were the lamps lighted, and rivers of crimson carpeting glowing in the light, and there was actually a last man on a last ladder, driving in a last nail. Now were a party of soldiers standing at their posts outside, holding torches—animated chandeliers—a pleasant device ingeniously adapted by the one novel-reading officer out of the Legend of Montrose. Now were the carriages arriving, and now was the colonel and his followers, bashful as boys, drawn up to welcome their company. The whole society of Eastport came, and its many mixed yarns, of which the mass was coarse enough,

were woven together in a cord of average quality. A few gold and coloured threads carried off the rest. They came in swarms. They spread over the rooms.

For that night the Campbell girls seemed to be rampant. Their voices were heard in all corners. They led the military about, as it were in handcuffs, and with an air of ownership. They were delighted with all things. It seemed to be Captain Cadby's "snaffle" enlarged in a microscope. That free and familiar officer went round with the more daring of the two, who had secured him as her prey. "'Pon my soul," said he, in his pleasant easy manner, "you *are* the gamest pair I ever encountered—you are, indeed! I'm not joking."

Picini—bright-eyed and mercurial—was in the gallery leading his orchestra. For in this point Fernor had prevailed; they had got down this famous band. Captain Cadby was in deep protest; and, far on in the night, he said many times with the earnestness and feeling that sets in after supper, "I wish to God they would play the Pop-goes-the-Weazel Galop."

Fernor leaned against a pillar near the door, listening. "So punctuality is not to be of our

virtues, it seems," he said. "Even *they* are in time!" He was thinking of his mother and sisters, who had long since debouched, taken up good ground, and were already well engaged with skirmishers. The three girls had been "placed out" respectably. There were many officers of retiring natures working on half time. Young Brett hovered about Fermor wistfully, and made a request. "My dear friend," said Fermor, answering him good naturedly, "it would be useless. You see they are engaged, what they call so many deep. Besides, I tell you frankly, it would not do exactly —you see."

But the youth longed to know Fermor's sisters, for the prestige of the thing.

"Well," said Fermor, with a sigh, "as you please. Come!" Selecting the youngest, Laura, as the more innocent, who was trooping by exultingly, talking, rustling her dress and exuberant, he stopped her on the highway. "Laura," he said, "you will let me introduce a friend of mine;" and he leant upon the word by way of warning. Laura dropped at once into the introductive smile.

"Mr. Brett!" said Fermor. But Laura was a dancing Black Brunswicker, trained neither to give

nor to accept quarter. With that corps minutes in a ball-room are counted as golden sands; they are economists of time. So, when she saw "Little Brett" fully revealed:

"O no," she said, shaking her head sadly; "quite, *quite* full—out of the question—so sorry," and rushed away to the field, with her companion in arms. That poor child Brett, who saw her afar "in screams"—no doubt at him—was dreadfully overcome.

The night was getting on. Here was a first galop, or perhaps first "riot." Picini had rushed into his famous Pandemonium Galop—a wild inspiring "Call," which could not be resisted. The Eastport young men and women were kept on half diet, in matter of dancing, all the year. A full meal was rare. When the first notes of the Pandemonium were heard, they flung themselves on it like shipwrecked passengers before whom food is set.

Fermor, still at his post, looked on. "This is really pushing it too far!" he said, indignantly. "That elder one, perhaps, wants to train me—break me in, I suppose. I must teach that lady I am not quite a schoolboy. I shall wait no longer. It will be a good lesson for them."

Showers was keeping close to the door, perhaps watching him, looking for material for his odious jokes. Him, too, he would disappoint. He was walking away, when a fresh party entered and went through the form of presentation to the bashful committee. This hid them for a moment. But the next instant, to his amazement, he saw that the two figures, who were entering, a little bewildered, into a strange country—as it were into a tropical island—were his neighbour Mr. Carlay, and his neighbour's daughter! The father grim, unjointed as ever, and in an evening dress apparently of some dark metal—as stiff as one of the hired chandeliers; but the daughter, fresh, blooming, fair—dressed, as it seemed to him, sumptuously, and, what he more approved of, with good taste, and with jewels in her hair. They both stood a moment dazzled, like strangers in a foreign land, and then Fermor, who was almost rubbing his eyes, saw “that Showers” hurry up (Fermor had done him injustice—he was not watching *him*), seize on them, overpower them with welcome, and bear them away. Some sort of welcome, too, Fermor had been getting ready, which he had now to throw aside as useless. Presently he saw them

enthroned by the officious Showers on a dais kept for distinguished people. He saw smiles of delight on Miss Carlay's face as Showers wantoned in his low fescennine jests. He heard two of his own cloth passing by say to each other that "Showers was making a good thing of it up there," and was a "confounded" lucky fellow.

She had seen Fermor too, and had given no start of joyful surprise, but merely a tranquil nod, as though the thing were of course. Showers was jubilant, exultant, and almost "dancing" round them, always impeding Fermor's view. "Just like them all," he said, bitterly; "a new doll for every day in the week. And such a doll!" He saw, too, Sir Hopkins standing with them, talking pleasantly, with his arm on Showers's shoulder, in good-humoured affection.

Here they were at last. Fermor saw their entrance from afar off. It was unassuming and timid; Pauline, the brother, and Violet a little behind. "Heavens!" thought Fermor, with a little stamp, "will no one impress a little style upon them. What *are* they afraid of?" The public did not form an avenue to stare at them as they came in. And the dress! Great efforts had been made, but

there was something wanting. There was no sensation. Why, indeed, should there be? Violet was not brilliant or splendid; yet her little troubles and anxieties had given her a soft look, and a sort of seductive interest. Many faces turned to look after her: especially those experienced eyes who, like bric-a-brac collectors, can tell a bit of real beauty, however odd and rococo the setting. Pauline, in truth, dimmed her a little.

Fermor went up to them. "You are late," he said, calmly, to the brother; "I have waited a whole hour at the door. Come," and he took Violet's arm, "we must find you a seat on the dais."

Violet shrank away. "O no, not in that public place, dear Charles—O no."

Fermor let go her arm at once. He had been much annoyed that evening. "As you please," he said. "I only want you to take your proper place among the company. But just as you please."

"O yes, of course," said Violet, hurriedly; "let us go there at once."

"Which then is it to be? I dare say there will

be no getting a chair *now*," said he. "Was there any mistake about the hour?"

"No," said her sister, calmly; "the carriage did not come, and Violet's headache was so bad, that at one time we thought of giving it up altogether."

Fermor did not answer.

"Here is a chair now," he said presently. "We must go through a quadrille, I suppose, for the benefit of these people here, or we shall furnish them with some food for talk. I shall come back in a moment." But one of the secret causes of Fermor's bitterness was that the public were not so absorbed in his motions as he expected.

As he moved away, Pauline touched him gently. There was an imploring look in her large eyes. She said: "This is a very trying place for her. Be a *little* soft with her; encourage her, and she will do very well. You must promise me."

Fermor could not trust himself to speak. This was more of the family "intimidation." He had no reply ready, so he merely bowed and strode away.

Sir Hopkins and Showers passed him, arm in arm.

There was a sort of ritual and a "form" of thanksgiving chanted through that night. It was heard at all corners. It was charming, delightful, delicious! Young ladies fell into little contortions of rapture. They never, in the course of their lives, had experienced anything to approach its enchanting character! From the hundred-and-one little processions made that night, backwards and forwards, under cool and tropical conditions, from ball to supper room, and from supper to ball room—the same anthem was raised. The beatific vision was found at last. So with the military showmen, who were busy with their duties all the night. They accepted these compliments with modest diffidence, brushing them away, as it were, like flies. "O, I say, come," would the bashful warriors repeat. "Good! *You*, indeed. You are chaffing me! You see—er—we know how to do it. That's the whole secret, you see." The devotee on his arm, however, received it as a grand and dazzling truth.

Borne on the flux and reflux was seen the major, glass in eye, and a smile fixed into his mouth, very much on the principle that he fixed the glass into his eye. At heart he was a little

troubled, for the crowd was almost too great to admit of easy access to persons of quality. Often the breakers swept him past the shore on which he could distinctly make out noble inhabitants, like Sir Charles Longman; but when he had beaten back and made the shore with grievous hardship, he found them gone. In which struggles, though the glass was often torn from his eye, still he always kept the smile adhering firmly to his mouth.

Thus late in the night was he borne up to the Manuels. The wistful, almost worn, face of Violet, high as it were upon a rock, looking out sadly, struck even him. He came up to them.

“Charming, isn’t it?” he said, joining his voice to the choir’s. “I declare I think I have never seen a thing better done. I remember at Nice there were some officers of the French Guides, young Baläy, and some more, who——”

Pauline, who had some secret trouble of her own, here interrupted him, a little abruptly it must be said.

“Major Carter, would you do a kind thing, and take me round the room; I want so much to see the people—would you?”

“Dear me!” said Major Carter, with deep intonation of surprise. “Good gracious! To be sure. How delightful! A regular exploring expedition. Come, Miss Manuel. Now this is what I call confidence.”

They set out. Major Carter chatted pleasantly all the way, and described, and gave the names of every one, as a waxwork showman does his figures. Pauline scarcely listened; but she looked eagerly where he pointed his wand, which perhaps answered as well. Still, there was a half-sarcastic tone about his speech, a little different from his usual deferential manner, and which, on another occasion, she might have remarked.

“And how odd,” he said, suddenly, “that you, Miss Pauline, should have turned curious about these lay figures. For *me*, whom some of these young fellows would disrespectfully call a Fogie (I am serious), it is intelligible; but for Miss Pauline to turn curious about things of this sort——”

Pauline answered him absently. “O yes,” she said, “of course. And could you tell me who that is?”

“That old lady out of a jar of spirits of wine? She’s a ‘preparation,’ Miss Pauline—Lady Man-

tower. I know most of them. For, to tell you the truth," said he, stopping short, and turning round to look at her, "I am about as curious in old 'Peerages' and 'Landed Gentrys' as others are in *old Army Lists*——"

He leant a little on the last words. There was a sharp wicked twitch in his mouth. The sound seemed to waken up Pauline. But after that slight emphasis the major's talk rolled away smoothly, as if it was on springs.

"But," continued he, airily, "popular prejudices are almost unaccountable. There are people, you know, who resent your prying into their family papers, and inquiring into their pedigree and history. Some won't have it on any terms. So I think—on—the—whole, my dear Miss Pauline," said the major, gaily renewing his march, "where there is so much prejudice it is better to let the thing be. Genealogical inquiries are often found dangerous. Now you understand me, I see."

Pauline, quite abstracted from what she was earnestly searching for, was now looking at Major Carter with perfect intelligence and a little alarm.

"Dangerous!" she repeated.

"Bless me!" said he, cantering away from the

subject. "Do look at Sir Charles Longman, he has got his foot in a lady's dress, and cannot see her trying to pull it away. He thinks there is some convulsion of nature going on under the floor. Ha, ha! Not bad, that. And look, Miss Pauline—that tall man dancing. He is separated from his wife. There was some story about a Mrs. Burton Cox. I am the worst person in the world for details of that sort."

Another listener might reasonably have disputed this affectation of modesty on his part, for without flattery he was an excellent authority in that department. But Pauline heard nothing about Sir Charles, or Mrs. Burton Cox. Her voice became low, and gentle, and appealing.

"It *is* dangerous," she said, and she looked back at Violet's wistful face; "but these things are often said and done without thought or reflection. Indeed they are," she added, with great earnestness, "and they are repeated and exaggerated—indeed you must think so. I, myself, say a hundred things in the day on the moment, which I no more mean than——"

"Good news! good news!" said he, gaily; "we shall have placards out in the morning announcing

it for the benefit of the poor youths you gibbet in the drawing-rooms. How glad they shall be. Look at old Jackson, doesn't he look as if he was corded up securely in brown paper?"

"But," continued Pauline, despairing almost to bring him back to her subject, "if any foolish speech of mine about—about, as you say, Army Lists—or——"

"Army Lists?" said the major, in his gayest gamut. "Ah! 'Partridge always.' *Toujours perdrix*. The young ladies' rock ahead. I believe—really and truly I do—that the fruit in the garden of Eden was an Army List. You *will* come back to that subject. Here we are, you see, back again at our family party. You don't want me any more? Then I shall say good-by—for the—*for* the present."

CHAPTER THE SIXTH.

THE BALL—ONE TILL THREE.

FERMOR, a little softened, was indeed making his way over to Violet, and generously publishing an amnesty for the past. Violet saw him coming, and the wistful look fled. Showers, with Miss Carlay on his arm, was drifted up near him. The low triumph on Showers's face was too much, and he walked straight across to Miss Carlay.

The round fair honest face looked up at him hopefully, almost with delight. "I never expected to see you here," said Fermor. "Nor did I hear you were coming—though there was nothing surprising in that. I mean my not hearing it."

She smiled. "How were we to tell you?" she

said, gently. "We never see you now. You have given us up."

"I am very busy now," said Fermor. "I have given up vanities. I have forsworn all my old ways and pleasures. I have no right to amuse myself. I am to look the world in the face now, and who cares about me *now*?"

"I am very sorry, *very* sorry," said the girl, opening and shutting her fan. "I thought we were friends of yours, and you—bore with us so kindly."

"O yes," said Fermor, with artificial carelessness (he was getting into one of the dramatic situations he loved), "that is all the old story, you know. It is very good of you to say so. But after all, what does it reduce itself to? A book or so lent, an hour or so of my tediousness bestowed on you. This is the way we go through life. Tomorrow you will be next door to some one else. And *his* figure will be refracted into heroic proportions. The day after, I shall be next door to some one else, and *she* will be refracted too. I have not told you half of my philosophy yet. You were right, after all, in dealing with me as the merest of acquaintances."

"I never dreamt of such a thing," she said, a little sadly; "and if you would take the trouble of explaining——"

"Really?" said Fermor, carelessly. "And you *are* curious to know?"

At this moment interposed Showers, eager, alarmed, and panting like a horse at the end of a long stage. "Now, Miss Carlay," he said; "we can go now. There is not such a crowd now, and we can reach the supper-room before it is opened."

Fermor lifted his eyes quietly to hers, and moved his chair a little. She dropped her eyes. There was a pause. The simplest, most unsophisticated girls are born with these ball-room artifices.

"But," she said, "Mr. Showers, it seems so crowded still. We shall never get through."

Showers urged it as a thing of course, yet nervously. "Do come," he said, holding out his arm ready bent. "I shall manage it, never fear."

She was so honest and natural, this girl, and saw he was so earnest, that on another occasion she would have gone with him at every risk of personal sacrifice. But Fermor's eyes were on her.

"Would not," she said, irresolutely—"would not

a little later do as well? Say after the next dance. There, that's settled," she added, with gaiety.

Showers was deeply wounded. "Very well," he said, "very well."

Fermor stood up. "What!" he said, "after Mr. Showers has had the trouble of fighting his way through all that humanity to get to you! For shame, Miss Carlay. *That* is cruelty, if you like. Look at his arm waiting. No, no. Go. Do; for the mere decency of the thing. The flowers will be all withered if you go later. Surely, after Mr. Showers has had such trouble—No, I am sure you will."

And with a pleasant smile and a sort of half-nod, as of encouragement to her, he moved gaily away. She looked after him with a half-wounded, half-astonished expression, then set Showers's troubled heart at rest by going with him. Fermor, at the other end, watched them, smiling. He was infinitely pleased with himself.

Strauss's Valse was now winding out again. He listened with half-closed eyes as the music seemed to sway up and down. Some floated by him as harmoniously as the music. Others with vulgar action, in the loud spasmodic trot of a lame horse.

He had a sort of toleration even for these. Possibly they knew no better. But some one touched him on the arm. It was the brother of Violet.

"Charming music," said Fermor, languidly. "Listen, now. There, the subject comes in again."

"Yes," said the other, bluntly. "But it seems as if it has made you forget Violet altogether. You were to dance with her, were you not?"

Fermor, becoming hard and cold, lifted his eyes, as who should say, "Well? Granted."

"You were to dance with Violet," continued the other, more loudly; "and made a sort of point of it—to show her to the company, you said."

Fermor felt his colour rising at the *manner* of all this. "Well," he said; "I *intend* to do so. The night is scarcely over."

"Well; better do it at once," said the brother. "I tell you the truth, candidly—though it *is* only a trifle, these suspenses and agitations are *not* good for her. She has had too much of them lately. You know, as well as we do, she is too delicate to be trying experiments on."

"Trying experiments on!" said Fermor, his face darkening. "I don't follow."

"Yes," said the other, more hard still. He al-

ways showed that he had no awe of Fermor. "She can't bear it. It is almost cruel. She has been accustomed to be watched and petted and treated with kindness among us all. It must be kept up, or any coldness would kill her."

Fermor's chest was heaving, but he dreaded the absurdity of quarrelling with any quasi relatives. "You will excuse me," he said, calmly, "if I cannot understand you."

"Then we ought to understand each other," said the other. "She is too precious to us to let ceremony stand in the way."

"This is scarcely the place to enter on these matters," said Fermor, bowing; "if you would not mind concluding your remarks in the morning. As to the dance, you may reassure yourself and your sisters; I was just going. I assure you I require no inspiration in such matters."

He left young Manuel.

"Upon my word," he said to himself, "things are coming to a nice pass. To be schooled and lectured by her sister, I suppose I *must* put up with that; but from the brother I'll *not* take it. I must show them they have not got *quite* a poor soul among them. Upon *my* word! As for Violet,

poor child, *she* is not accountable. But she is weak and foolish, and they do what they like with her."

He was thinking whether he should go at once to take her. Poor child, after all there should be indulgence for her, and she was not responsible for these people about her. Raised seats in tiers went round the room, and very far off he could see her face looking out anxiously and painfully, as from a rock, expecting succour. It looked so piteous, that he thought he would at once walk across to her.

But again Showers and his partner, homeward-bound from the private view of the supper-room, came up. Showers was pettish. "Will you see Miss Carlay back through the crowd? Colonel wants me. Shall only be a moment, *only* a moment, on my honour." (This he added to Fermor with great impressiveness.)

Fermor did the work appointed to him very successfully. She was very silent, and looked up at him now and then timorously, as if half shy, half afraid. Fermor was gay and unconcerned. Just then Picini from his gallery intoned Strauss once more. It was one of the sad songs sung by a cor-net. "Do you hear," said Fermor; "one of those

divine vales. You should be dancing, not sitting down, to such music. Where is the wretched being who has dared to be late? Shall I fetch him?"

"It is Mr. Showers," she said; "but I am sure he will not come. I am keeping you. You are dying to dance it."

"Well, I am," said he; "but as for looking for any one in *this* place——"

"How charming!" she said; "I would give the world to be dancing it."

"But you are engaged," said Fermor, gravely. "We must respect these little obligations. As for *me*, I have served my turn. I am fit only for being carried out, like the old Indians, and left with a pot of rice on a mountain."

"No, no!" said she; "*indeed* I don't think so."

"I don't mean literally," he said, gravely. "Well, then, putting off that exposure for a few days," added Fermor, in his gayest mood, "suppose we try this valse. Ah! but Mr. Showers!"

"O, *don't* mind *him*!"

"Don't mind *him*!" said Fermor. "What, Showers, the favoured, the admired, the man

whom the world is talking of and congratulating! What, not mind *him*? Can you be serious?"

She coloured. "It is all his fault," she said, rising. "Would you mind, now——"

In a moment Strauss had engulfed them. They were floating round. Fermor talked through the music (and through the dancing), as they do in melodramas. Curiously, he had forgotten, for the moment, other duties and other faces. No matter, the night was long.

"The surprise of seeing you here to-night!" said Fermor, still in motion. "I had no idea of it. I suspect a mystery. *Do* explain."

Half a dozen turns. Then she answered, with great confidence, "I wished—that is, papa and I wished—that you should see me in another character than that of an invalid. You must have been weary of me in that shape."

The face of Fermor, which was over Miss Carlay a foot or so, smiled with complacent triumph.

A few more turns. "I have never seen *her* yet," said she. "Miss Violet. She is here, is she not?"

"O yes," said he. "In the other room, I believe. And now tell me—why are you so curious?"

She did not answer this direct question. "*Do* let us look for them."

But Fermor was not so eager. "We shall find them," he said, "when this crowd clears off a little. What boors these countrymen are! Sir, *would* you? You are destroying this lady's dress." This to a fatty harmless man, who staggered back in dreadful confusion, with flames rushing to his face.

"I am afraid," she said, "this will be my only chance. For I don't know," she continued, "did we tell you" (she knew well she had not) "that we are leaving this place in a few days?"

Fermor hastily drew rein, halted under a tree, that is at a pillar. "Going away!" he said.

"Yes," she said. "I am *very* sorry, oh, *so* sorry. But we are obliged."

"O, of course," said Fermor.—"Why not?" he was almost going to add; "you are not obliged to give notice to the whole parish."—"And when was this sudden move thought of, pray?"

"Papa says so. O, I am *so* sorry. I was beginning to like this place. Every one—that I knew, at least—was so kind to me."

"I am sorry, too," said Fermor, "to lose my neighbours. These things can't be helped. We must come and go—it is a law of the nineteenth century. We shall meet sometime and somewhere, I suppose."

"I hope so," she said.

"And poor Showers," he continued. "I hope you won't be angry—you know you have taught me to speak freely to you. What is to become of *him*? I was under the impression—at least, his manner and behaviour made me think so—that really there was something 'auspicious,' as the newspapers say, on foot. No? Is he to follow? or to wait, or——"

"Absurd!" she said, eagerly. "What ridiculous stories! I dislike him more than any one I have seen for years."

"Astonishing! Amazing!" said he. "And now," he continued, smiling, "who is there, as a matter of mere curiosity, that you *like* better than any one you have seen for years?"

Again here was the bird in the net of the fowler, as Fermor wished it to be. The bird fluttered, grew nervous, did not answer; but would have answered presently, when Mr. Carlay came grimly up. "We must go away," he said.

Fermor took her down stairs. "You must tell me these secrets another time. I may be useful to consult," he said, as he put on her cloak. "I shall call to-morrow;" then went back jubilant; then he thought, with a start, of Violet. For though the night *was* long, he had detained her a little. But the wistful face was gone from the rock. He could not find them anywhere. "Gone in to supper, I suppose," he thought, with unreasonable resentment. He was turning away when he was touched on the arm.

"Hanbury! Mr. Hanbury?" Fermor said, "I was told that you were gone away, and that you had made all the traditional farewells in due form."

"I have come back," said the other, coldly; "and it seems not a bit too soon."

"That is for yourself, of course," said Fermor,

now relapsing into himself; "at least, so far as I can make you out. Excuse me, I am going to have some supper."

Hanbury happily crushed and repulsed, Fermor went, had supper, and drank champagne. He was very elated with the events of that night—with the dramatic events; he had acted the *Jeune Premier*. As he was putting the flask down, he felt a lowering face *on* him, like a cloud overhead. "What, followed me here?" he said, smiling. "Going to have some supper? Try that Mayonnaise, you know I am host here."

The other put him away, as it were impatiently, with his hand. "Fermor, I have been here," he said, "the whole evening. And I have seen it all."

Fermor laid down his glass on the table, and said, "Indeed!"

"Yes," said the other, speaking very fast, "from the beginning of the night to the end. It was *very* cold and cruel. I could not have believed it, if any one had told me. But I am glad I am here myself. I should never have gone away."

"Now, if I might ask," said Fermor, trying to steady his voice, "what does all this mean?"

“I never saw such a change!” said the other. “It makes my heart bleed to look at her. Poor, poor child! Oh, Fermor, you ought to blush.”

“This is getting unbearable,” said Fermor, losing all patience; “it *must* be stopped. Do *you* think you have a right to come and lecture me? I suppose you have received your instructions. But I tell you what, Mr. Hanbury, I am too old to be schooled *now*, by you or any one else. Your brusque and honest candour must select some other object for its confidence—it is disagreeable to me. Upon my word, we are coming to a pretty pass!”

“O, do not take it in this way,” said the other, just as excitedly. “You must hear the truth at all risks! I fear you think, because there are two poor helpless girls, with a more helpless mother——”

“Then *you* shall hear the truth too,” said Fermor, turning round on him in a fury. “You shall hear, that it is exceedingly improper to thrust yourself into my concerns. A very great liberty! There! This fine candour and manly qualities won’t be your privilege, I can tell you. I look on your interference as *exceedingly* ill judged, and, if it is pursued further, I shall have to give

you a serious lesson, my good friend." (Fermor threw all the insult of voice and manner he could muster into this speech.)

"And you can speak to me in this way after your conduct," said the other, also angry. "Very well. I *now* begin to see what you are—a cold, cruel, hard——"

Two arms opened between, in gentle expostulation. "Hush! hush! My good friends," said Sir Hopkins, "you are talking very loud. You don't want the whole room, I am sure, to assist at this little discussion, eh?" Some stray men who had dropped in—now that work was nearly over and they had earned their crust—for a solitary and substantial repast, had been drawing near, attracted by the sound of loud voices.

"Hush!" said Sir Hopkins again. "We can talk this over in the morning. Come with me, Charles. This way, down towards this chicken salad. Everything here seems excellent. Champagne, please. No, not in *that* glass. There; thanks. Now I think I am complete." And stooping down over his supper, Sir Hopkins said, in a low voice, filtered, as it were, through his chicken

and his salad, "Admirable, Charles! I heard the whole. You cut him up like a melon."

"Such a thing!" said Fermor, still furious. "Everybody seems to think they are entitled to bring me to book. I believe he is set on—employed by the family—for this work."

"Is there any bread, I wonder?" Sir Hopkins said, looking up and down the table anxiously. "I dare say you have remarked, at balls, the bread always gets away, behind somewhere. Ah! my little rustic! was *she* here to-night? Ah, to be sure she was, as fresh and as gay as a lark."

"Ah! That's the cry *now*," said Fermor, indignantly; "wasting away. I, of course, wearing her into the grave."

"What nonsense!" said Sir Hopkins. "Who says this? The sister, I suppose?"

"Exactly, sir. Always to this one tune. I am getting sick of it."

"Ah!" said Sir Hopkins, "fine woman that, but knows what she is about. Can see that in her eye. *She* will pull the whole family through the world. Mark my words, settle them all well, even to the mother. I know the sort of woman exactly.

I dare say takes a little of the schoolmistress on her. Now *may* I give you a scrap of advice. You are a man of the world, and I may speak freely to you."

"O, sir," said Fermor, "your experience is always useful."

"Yes," said the other. "But, on principle, *never* let them school you. On principle, mind. They will encroach until you find yourself growing down every day into a child. You know this yourself as well as I do."

"Exactly, sir," said Fermor, eagerly; "that is the view that has guided me all through."

"I thought so," said the other. "(My dear Charles, there was a Seltzer-water bottle here a moment ago, and some one has carried it off. Thanks.) No, I am serious. You are quite right in making a stand against these people. I assure you, I tell you candidly, I quite admire the spirit, as well as the clever diplomacy, that has regulated your behaviour. You see I have been watching. And as for the *capital* manner in which you disposed of that rough person just now, who, no doubt, as you said, *was set on* by others to that particular duty, it quite commands my admiration. You

want no advice, my dear fellow. Who *are* they, by-the-by?"

"I don't know, I am sure, sir," said Fermor. "It is rather too late, I fear, to be thinking of *that*, now."

Sir Hopkins looked up at him from his chicken salad. "No, Charles, that is quite a false impression. Even after a treaty is signed, we, that is, nous autres, can have 'a rectification,' as it is called. We can never be too late with anything—excepting death, and actual marriage. There's a truth for you in return for your excellent chicken salad."

The ball was breaking up. The company were drifting away like sheep. The ground was open and clear as a prairie, and a few untired couples were flying round wildly. Picini, fresh as at the beginning, was leading on one of his most desperate galops. It seemed to echo down like music in a church, the floor was so clear.

Shawls and opera cloaks were being put on. A universal hymn and responses were heard on all sides. "Such a delightful evening! Enjoyed ourselves so much!" To which military choristers

in scarlet surplices would answer, in full acclaim, "Aw! so pleased, aw! Quite glad you liked it—'pon word am!" as though under a tacit suspicion of insincerity, and the speaker was anxious to clear himself.

Fermor, coming out full of pride and excitement, met his mother and sisters at the door, in the act of being shawled and clothed. They were in the hands of a band of admiring men. "Such a charming evening!" whispered Lady Laura, whom long service had trained to business, and who always brought a large white bag, easily recognisable, and marked "L. F." ("Your worsted shoes, my dear, are at the bottom of the bag.") "Mr. Piper, Charles, has been *so* kind. Only for him I don't know *how* we should have managed. Charles! Mr. Piper—my son!" And Charles found himself introduced to a bashful child, little older than one of the regimental drummer-boys. "Next brother to Sir Thomas. No children," she whispered Charles. "Quite taken with Alicia." Alas! at every entertainment there was to be always the typical man, who was "quite taken with Alicia."

"By the way," she continued, "we were all ad-

miring that striking-looking girl you were with. Who is she, my dear? Such style, and quite an air. I was struck by her. The only decent person I have seen here. Come, dears. Mr. Piper, you won't forget? Any day, at three. You will always find *some* of us in."

Fermor turned back into the rooms again. It was over. Picini was disbanding his forces. Sleeping violins were being tucked away in snug green-baize cradles. Fermor looked up at them. Major Carter came glissading to him over the smooth floor.

"Dear Captain Fermor," he said, "I am so glad to meet you. Going home? Would you mind letting me walk with you? I have something to tell you."

Fermor was gracious. "Come in here and have some wine."

"Most kind of you. I should like it of all things. That man Hanbury—where is he?—he was skulking about here just now."

Fermor helped himself. He had not had too much, nor was he going to have too much; but good wine made him talk with eagerness, and a sort of fervour.

"I know," he said. "He has honoured me with some of his instructions. But I fancy *I* gave him a lesson instead."

"I heard," said the major, smiling. "It was admirable, I am told. So quiet and gentlemanly, and, at the same time, so determined. He has not got over it yet."

"The idea!" said Fermor. "There's a set of them that think they have a right to come up one after the other and lecture me. I won't stand it, Major Carter. I have made up my mind this night. I won't stand it. What relation has this man to me? What right has he, because he is a great strong animal, and rides strong horses, to come and hector me? I won't take it from any man."

"O, of course," said the major, filling his glass, "he has his instructions. It's only natural. He is still kept *on*, you know."

"Ah! you think so too?" said Fermor, eagerly. "Do you know, the same idea occurred to me, and to Sir Hopkins."

"I was sure you would see it in that way," said the major, selecting a bonbon in the shape of a mushroom. "I suppose he was sent for."

“Sent for!” said Fermor, scornfully. “They may send for a dozen more like him. That won’t do.”

They were now getting their coats and hats.

“By the way, Showers—Ah, Captain Fermor!” and Major Carter shook his head profoundly. He had a young man’s hat and a young man’s cape, and, under the lamps, looked as fresh as any young man. “I met him going out, absolutely raving and imprecating. I never saw such a beating! You have thrashed him—morally.”

“O, nonsense!” said Fermor, smiling.

They were now in the street. It was half-past four, and very cold, clear, and bright.

“Would you take my arm?”

Fermor did so graciously.

“Ah, you have known me only a very short time, and I have no right to speak freely about your affairs. I know you don’t permit it, even with men who are old friends, and I must say I admire that reserve and restraint in you. But I will say I am sorry for the whole business. I am.”

“You mean——?” said Fermor.

“I mean, I am sorry to see the way your gene-

rous conduct has been received. I don't like it," said the major, with growing warmth. "A man gets into the thing; there are people by to work on his pity and appeal to his sympathies. I understand *that* sort of pressure, and how a refined and chivalrous man may give way. But he shouldn't be taken advantage of. No. I confess I took another view at the beginning; so did Sir Hopkins; so would any man of the world. But that is the way with a certain class of people. They will always encroach."

Fermor did not resent this free view of his affairs. "It is not so bad as that. I suppose they mean well. Yet I am afraid there *is* something in what you say," he said.

"If," continued Major Carter, expostulating, "they were of quality, one might put up with a good deal, but when we hear such stories——"

"O, I know all *that*," said Fermor, drawing himself up sensitively. "I ascertained all that beforehand. The—er—wine business, and all that. Younger sons of the best families have often been put into that sort of thing."

"No; I did not mean *that*," said the major, "but really I feel a delicacy in touching—but I

have correspondents everywhere, and I confess *some* stories have reached me."

"*Indeed!*" said Fermor, eagerly. "Of what description, pray?"

"O, I had rather not. People write me everything. This was from old Foley, who served in Spain. Some other time. I will show you the letter one of these days."

"If," said Fermor, excitedly, "there was anything like concealment in the business, I *never* could bear *that*. No feelings of pity or regard would stand in my way."

"We shall see about it another time," said the major. "How cold it is! I declare here are my lodgings! You see *I* have my latch-key like the young fellows. Good night!"

"Good morning!" said Fermor.

"Ha, ha! very good, *very* good," said the major, laughing heartily. "Only for my known character, what things would be said of me. Good morning, then!"

This was the end of the Eastport ball. For many people in the Eastport colony it was an epoch to look back on—a glorified milestone in their life. To unbroken Eastport girls it seemed

like their first pantomime; unbroken Eastport youths it hopelessly unsettled. Young Mr. Piper, a military "child," and whose years should have protected him from "undue influence," was sent away home, raging with a frantic passion for Alicia Mary. That virgin had at last struck fire. But in Fermor it had wrought the most striking change of all. In the morning he looked back at the land on which he had been standing the evening before, as it were across a river, and the Manuel Family had not come over with him.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH.

"JANE," THE FAIRY GODMOTHER.

THE night of that Eastport festival, which for many young girls in Eastport was a night of sweet and exquisite dreams, in which lovely scarlet angels floated quite glorified and spiritual, was for Violet one of the most wretched of her life. All her thoughts seemed to be seething and boiling in that small head ; her bed seemed to be turned into a furnace. She suffered a weight of agony, and when day came, and the steady daylight of nine o'clock, she rose up exhausted, and trembling, and with a worn face, but with eyes that sparkled like the lamps of the night before.

The anxious sister, Pauline, came into Violet's

room as soon as she heard her stirring, which was indeed betimes. She found her hot and flushed. There was a little wildness, too, in her eyes. She had, in truth, never slept, which was but a small evil of its kind ; but she had tossed, and fretted, and been miserable, until morning brought daylight and almost despair.

“Darling Violet,” said her sister, going up to her, “this is dreadful. You will wear yourself into a grave. Your heart cannot bear it, I know it cannot.”

“I am better this morning,” she said, “much better—if I could only make myself sleep.”

Pauline looked at her, irresolute as to how she should begin. “We have been thinking and talking over that ball of last night ; and now, my dear darling Violet, this is to be considered, and is worth considering. You were very happy a short time ago—we were all very happy—until certain things took place, and you are not strong, and much anxiety or sorrow would wear you. Now, dearest, is it not better, before it is *too* late, to have courage to go back. I *fear* we have made a mistake. We, I say, who ought to have been more sensible, and to have known better. Now what

we have thought is this—and it is a cruel thing, darling, to propose—would it not be better, after last night, to have done with this—altogether?"

Violet's glistening eyes had been widening and distending all this time. It was only at the last word that she caught her sister's meaning. She broke out in a fright.

"No; no! I can't, I could not. And to come from me! No, I *could* not, indeed," she added, piteously.

"Ah," said Pauline, in tones of the softest compassion, "that is it, darling. Is it not better that it *should* come from you, than that——"

"What!" said the other, excitedly. "Do you know anything? Do you believe it? Do you——"

She was so excited that her sister said to her, "No, no! it is only that I *fear*. You know you said it yourself last night. We, who have seen a little more of the world than you, dearest, understand the meanings of little signs, which you would pass by. Indeed, it is better, Violet, that you should see it now, than see it later."

"Then you *have* heard something. He told you last night," said Violet, distractedly. "O, I had a presentiment that this was coming!" And

she lay back on the sofa and panted nervously, and a look of scared terror came to her face that quite alarmed Pauline. She ran to her.

"It is nothing," she said. "I am all wrong, indeed I am. I know nothing, and have heard nothing—upon my word and honour, as I stand here, I have not. It is only some of my foolish sense and caution. Won't you believe me when I tell you so?"

The other raised herself, drew a slow sigh of relief, then gave a child's smile.

"O, you terrified me," she said. "I am getting so foolish and nervous. But it is nonsense, all nonsense. I know Charles so well now—better than *you*, Pauline. And he has these ways, which are ways of his own. And you *know* he has told us over and over again that he hates that public exhibiting, and 'engagements on view,' as he calls it. He never does anything without a purpose, and I shouldn't be surprised," she added, with a sudden flash of gaiety, "if he was what he calls trying me. Ah. There it is."

Her sister was so relieved at this change from a scene she dreaded, and almost delighted that she accepted this far-fetched fancy, with her arms

about this fluttering Violet, even fortified it. She was sure it was so; was confident that out of his sensitiveness he had planned this little experiment. And presently the sisters, by mutual encouragement, had worked it into actual pleasant proof of attachment and devotion; and Violet, as if then was now, finding something to rejoice at, said, with alacrity, that she would now come down.

The maid who—now a long time ago—had thought Fermor “lovely,” had come in, busy with shutters and curtains. She saw Violet’s worn face, the weary lines of pain upon her cheeks, and the tightened look about her forehead. More significant still were her strained eyes. She was a “smart” girl, and glowing ribbons always were fluttering from her caps like pennants from a mast. All through she had taken a deep interest in the love affair, and, strange to say, knew perfectly all the ebbs and flows of that uncertain current. For Fermor she had the deepest admiration. Had any one introduced the well-known Apollo Belvidere into her associations, that famous type of plastic beauty would have exactly satisfied her as a standard for her hero. She yearned for some

such type. And yet the hero himself, when she threw open the door for him, hurried past her upstairs, not rude or blunt, but wholly unconscious of her, and of all the ribbon-flags with which she was purposely "dressed."

She had long guessed the state of things. That hall was indeed a sort of self-registering meter: the flags were often at the mast-head for a salute; but the personage to be saluted did not come. The two sisters were fond of her, and talked with her often. She amused them with legends of the ladies and gentlemen of her own sphere. Not that they needed gossip, but when she was busy with their dresses, and Violet sat with her long hair like a nun's veil on her head, "Jane," busy with the brush, poured out a stream of curious speculations, odd rumours, and dark suspicions which were rife in the society *she* affected. But in Violet she had a greater confidence.

She had sore suspicions about this business; and being, after all, an honest girl, was a little troubled in mind. At the same time she was convinced that the whole affair had been "mismanaged." The hero, she judged indulgently, being only like other heroes, in all ranks. But there were certain

little rules and traditions, without which affairs of this kind would never go well. These she had seen applied with success, in the instances of lovers down stairs—they were understood to be part of the established procedure. Down stairs, sighing coachmen, and eligible valets, in the progress of their courtship were treated with studied scorn, and elaborate contumely when *other* ladies and gentlemen were present; and this, it was felt, showed the power of the cruel fair, and piqued the ardour of the swain. With wonder and surprise Jane saw the total neglect of these wholesome principles, and from the beginning augured the worst.

Before that morning she had learnt the whole history of the ball. Through the interest of Fermor's esquire—a pleasant officer with whom she was intimate—she had secured the privilege of being present. That gentleman had even gone further, and with a soldier's thoughtfulness had borne her secret cakes, and yet more secret refreshment. The maid had therefore seen the whole from a gallery, and she was determined that morning to "speak her mind" to her while there was yet time.

Violet was a little hurried and excited in her speech. "Did I look well, Jane, last night?" she asked. "They told me I did, and I am sure we did all we could."

"Lovely, lovely, miss!" said Jane; "but I am afraid you're not well to-day."

"I could not sleep," said Violet, nervously; "never closed my eyes once. I don't know what is the reason."

"It was a beautiful ball, miss," said Jane, abruptly, and brushing with great activity.

"O, you were there!" said Violet, with a little start. "To be sure, I knew you were."

"Yes, miss; Mr. Bates, that is, the captain's gentleman, was good enough to put me in the front seat of the gallery. (He has great interest, you know.) And I saw you, miss, the whole night."

"Yes," said Violet, hurriedly; "I did not care to dance; I had a headache; I was dying to be at home again. O, Jane," she said, turning suddenly, "I am wretched and miserable; and, Jane, what is to become of me?" And Violet began to sob hysterically.

Jane had laid down her brushes, and was sooth-

ing her like an infant. "Now, now miss, you must not. This is what wears you so—don't think of it, it will all come all right."

Violet was now in spasms of agitation. She got up suddenly, and went over to the bed, on which she flung herself. The maid looked on in sore distress. Not for many minutes could all her soothing take effect.

Poor Violet felt she could confide in her, as indeed she might. "O Jane, Jane, and before them all too, was it not dreadful? Not that I mind *that*. But I fear—I do so fear—that they have been changing him to me—I know they have."

"No, no, miss," the maid said, with a smile of superiority. "Not that at all; you make too much of it, miss, indeed you do. *I* know what it is."

Violet became earnest, and looked at her steadily. "What is it?" she said.

Jane was thinking of the tactique popular below. "It's all wrong, miss. The thing has been mismanaged. I've seen it all along."

Thus poor Violet, catching eagerly at any plank, and beseeching her to tell, Jane became like an old fairy godmother, whom this young creature had come to consult, and to get advice. With

great wisdom (and with some difficulty in the choice of words, for Jane had delicacy), the maid expounded the true secret of success in such affairs, and the little old-fashioned amatory cruelties which still obtained in the servants' hall.

"It don't do," said the fairy godmother, "to let a gentleman come too easy, or come too often. They don't like it themselves, don't gentlemen. There are days," added Jane, as an illustration, "when I make believe not to see Mr. Bates, it might be in the street, or it might be on the road; and though I don't pretend to say that there's anything going on *there*, still, miss, you can have no manner of idea how he does take it. You see, when they have it all their own way, they come to take it as easy as—anything."

This seemed like truth to Violet, to whom anything like a little salvation in this emergency was welcome. Her eyes distended, and her breath came and went as the fairy godmother explained the mystery. The introduction of Mr. Bates as an illustration to the workings of the charm on him especially, did not import any burlesque into the matter. She even began to regard him with an interest which would have amazed that simple

soldier. She was told how on certain days he was received with an unbounded affection, purposely exaggerated to lead him into some slight forwardness; which, on the next occasion, would be seized on as an opening for treating him with the most mortifying and insulting neglect. A short course of this fitful treatment was enough to "take him down"—not only to take him down, but to reduce him to an unmanly and grovelling degradation. From whence he would be as unexpectedly—and as unreasonably—lifted from this level to the sunshine of unbounded favour.

"But," said the fairy godmother, coming more to the point, "if there was another gentleman, miss, as could be found—and I know of such as could be easily got, and willing, and whose place, indeed, by rights it *ought* to be—that were the *real way*!"

Violet's eyes opened still wider. She coloured a little, for she understood.

The captain, said the fairy godmother, was a charming gentleman, so fine and so high in his manners. But all gentlemen were the same in *that* point. They required to be "kept up and stirred." Now, couldn't Miss Violet just try it a little—ever

so little—and see how it would answer? Not to be just “quite so ready,” but more “stand off,” and, above all, just “lean a little” to that good but “soft” gentleman, Mr. Hanbury. Mark her words, if in a day or two the remedy had not the most startling result.

The child Violet listened, first with curiosity, then with hope, then with confidence, finally with devotion. Here was a reasonable chance. She caught at it. She began to think herself a mere infant, whose own folly was the cause of all; but here was a sensible woman come to advise her, but happily not called in too late.

“Now, miss,” said the godmother, “there’s another thing. You should have the two gentlemen together here of a night; just a nice little party of a dozen to look on; for it’s the *being done before people* that makes all the effect. No gentleman, miss, likes to see another gentleman put up before him, where there’s people by. As sure as I am standing here, miss, if you only get your mamma to have a few people in to tea, and have the two gentlemen together, and be a little partial to Mr. Hanbury, giving him his tea first,

or sitting with him in a corner, or even," added Jane, with a little hesitation, for she was not certain whether the mark of favour was so firmly established above, as it was below stairs, "putting a flower in his button-hole—as sure as you do this, everything will be well in the morning." More particular details, then, of this infallible nostrum she then disclosed, leaning on them so earnestly, that she had Violet gazing at her as intently as though she were a physician telling of a certain cure for any illness. The physician even inspired such hopes and confidence, that Violet began to question, a little nervously, whether that little gallantry about the flower and button-hole—on which her adviser seemed to rest above all—might not be introduced, with, of course, some dexterity. The poor child was so trusting, and so accustomed to lean upon every one for assistance, that it was easy to persuade her. So when her dressing was over, she had been changed into a little conspirator, for from the straightforward Pauline—but who, indeed, was conspiring in her own way—it was thought best to conceal the whole.

Early that morning came in Hanbury. They

had not seen him the night before. This was a thin, sad, unhearty man, a sort of changeling Hanbury.

Pauline started. "Come back?" she said.

"Yes," he answered, gloomily; "and you will own, not an hour too soon." He then told her of his quarrel with Fermor. "He has shown himself in his true colours," he added, speaking fast, "for which we should all be thankful. I have found him out to be what I always thought him, a cold, calculating, heartless fine gentleman. I have given him a lesson, and shall teach him a little more yet."

Pauline had listened with gathering wonder and even dread.

"O, folly! folly!" she said. "What *have* you been doing?"

"Doing!" said he; "I have saved *her*. I have at least *that* to comfort me; I have been of *some* use. You think I have some selfish view. Ah, no! I have long since given over that dream."

"O, what have you been doing?" said Pauline again. "I know you did not mean it, but everything is turning out so unfortunate. Surely, to

quarrel with him—with Violet's husband—you might have known——"

"But surely," he said, "you cannot mean—you don't suppose, after last night, that this will go on! Women believe to the end! But I know what his game is."

"Hush! hush!" said Pauline, rising; "we must not think of this. O, you should not have done that. *He* will think we have set you on, and he is so proud he will resent. No. Violet's whole soul and life is bound up in him. She believes in him still, and *will* believe through everything."

Hanbury looked at her, confounded. He gave a sort of groan. "It is to be always the same with me—the same stupid blundering John Hanbury to the end. I am very miserable and very unfortunate. And what am I to do?"

"Go to him at once," said Pauline, hurriedly, "we can only repair the mischief as well as we can."

"Go to him—well?"

"Go—go to him and tell him you are sorry. You know how men make these things up."

"Sorry!" said he, a little distractedly. "O, I

can't do that ! You don't know all that has passed, the words he used to me, which I *could* not pass over. *Indeed* I could not."

"But it must be set right. You don't know what mischief you may have done." Then, as Hanbury seemed irresolute, she added, after a pause: "I thought you would have done anything for Violet."

"What does it matter," he said, "after all? First wretchedness, now degradation. I care very little now. With all my heart, then."

"Ah, if you had seen her," said the sister, earnestly, "how her heart is set on this affair, how her life is bound up—how her little soul is wearing away——"

"To be sure," said he. "How selfish I have been. Of course it must be done. I will go at once."

"Always generous, noble, kind," said Pauline, taking his hand. "You talk of selfishness. At this moment I blush for myself. But we know not where to turn to, and moments are precious and slipping away, and this is our treasure, our only treasure."

Hanbury hurried out of the room.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH.

AMENDE.

FERMOR, who had risen late, looking back uneasily to the night before, as to a strange country through which he had driven, and brooding over his injuries, was walking up and down his room. He was still on the other side of the river, looking across; and on the opposite bank were the same figures standing there, but with another light on them. In fact, they were *other* figures.

A letter was presently brought in to him. It was from Sir Hopkins Pocock, and ran :

“DEAR CHARLES,—Could you spare me twenty minutes this morning? “H. P.”

He found him at his desk, with strong blue paper before him, and the papers in the despatch-box overflowing their banks; a sure symptom of heavy business. He laid down his pen and smiled.

"Well, Charles. How do you feel after your ball? Done uncommonly well. Wonderful! I was really greatly pleased. I have not tasted a better mayonaise I don't know when."

Fermor was glad that he was pleased; then looked restlessly at the overflowing banks.

"I have been a good deal over the world, as you know," continued Sir Hopkins, leaning back in his chair, and laying the tips of his fingers together as though he had sent for Fermor specially to tell him this. "And men out *there* are always getting up things of that kind. But they break down. Why? What would you say, now, was the reason?"

Fermor moved restlessly in his chair. "It is hard to say," he said. "By the way, sir, I think you had something to mention——"

Sir Hopkins drew in his chair suddenly, and became grave and official.

"I have this morning," he said, "been favoured with a despatch from her Majesty's Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies—the Right Honour-

able Harding Hanaper, M.P. That despatch is dated yesterday morning. It would seem, Charles," he added, becoming suddenly unofficial, "they desire my services once more. An important dependency—the name I am not at liberty to mention—will be vacant in a week or two, and I leave this to-morrow morning."

"Yes, sir," said Fermor, nervously.

"Well," said Sir Hopkins. "I sent for you because I knew it would interest you. I dare say it is about the most important news that has come to this little settlement for many months. No one," he added, looking at the large envelope with reflective complacency, "would suppose that this little paper contained such grave tidings and such responsibility. Of course there are drawbacks. Now they will begin worrying me out of my life with applications. It is almost as bad as the new manager of a theatre. Fancy, only yesterday came a letter, in anticipation, from my old friend Showers—of course about his young fellow. I can't well refuse him. I am writing to him by this post."

Pride and mortification came to Fermor's face in the shape of colour. He rose to go.

“Candidly, my dear Charles, I am sadly disappointed about you ; for I have a great opinion of your sense, and I *did* think there was in you all the matériel of a diplomatist ; ’pon my soul I did. But—you know—when I heard of that—hem—marriage of yours, and saw that when I asked, ‘Where is the money?’ and got no answer—‘Where was the love and folly and that sort of thing?’ and got no answer—and ‘Where was the connexion?’ and heard something about a wine merchant—when, in short, I found the business could be accounted for by no known reason on—the—face—of—God’s earth,” he added, excitedly, making these words fall like little sharp taps of a hammer, “why, I shook my head and said: ‘He won’t do for a diplomatist; he won’t do for me.’ There, Charles! There’s the candour you always like. But it is the truth, on my soul!”

Fermor stood biting his lip and colouring. He was deeply hurt. He did not answer for a few moments.

“I was afraid of this, sir,” he said, at last. “But I see it is hopeless to think of altering your opinion.”

“Good gracious!” said Sir Hopkins, starting up and seizing him by the hand. “How you misconstrue me. Am I not your relative? Do you suppose I would not like to do all I could for you? But I *must* look to myself. It is a load of responsibility. How could I be dragging about with me an impoverished assistant—we are speaking candidly, recollect—with what is called ‘a struggling family.’ These poor girls always have large families; they can’t help it. I couldn’t do it.”

“But you don’t consider, sir,” said Fermor, warmly, “a man’s position. His honour is often engaged. You don’t know everything. It is impossible to resist an appeal made to your sympathy and even compassion. It is not so easy as you think, sir.”

Sir Hopkins’s lip curled. “That sort of thing may do with boys of twenty. A delicate school-girl’s tears! It is simply absurd among grown-up people. I can understand it at a ball, where champagne makes a man do many a foolish thing; but in broad daylight——If that is all you are going on, it is nonsensical. I tell you, if you were my son, this moment I would walk straight out of this house to those people, and settle it off in half an

hour. It's shameful—'pon my word it's shameful," Sir Hopkins added, with warmth.

Fermor stood there with his eyes fixed upon the ground. He felt full of foolishness and of shame in the presence of this sensible man who had seen the world.

"I have no business to talk on this matter to you, I know. And it seems harsh and cruel and worldly, but I have your interest at heart, and the girl's too, I can tell you. O, I know the whole thing. It's a duty, Charles, as you have invited free speech in me, to set these things before you. Besides, who are they? Are they in Burke? No. Are they in the Blue Book? No. Where are they? Wine merchants! God bless me! A whole French romance about wine merchants! Besides, those stories! They should be looked into. I don't mind stories about men. There were heaps flying about Lord Poolbeg; but about a whole family!"

"Stories! Ah! yes. But I never heard," said Fermor, eagerly.

"Of course you didn't," said his friendly adviser. "That would scarcely happen. You don't expect people of that sort to take you into the parlour,

and say, 'My dear sir, there are such and such stories about us, which it is right you should know.' Scarcely, I think. No; Carter, who knows everybody, has picked them up somewhere."

"Yes, he did hint something to me last night," said Fermor, growing excited.

"Naturally," said Sir Hopkins. "It is not pleasant to do such things. I assure you I don't like it at this moment. There, I must go back to my letters. Time and tide, you know—and the Under-Secretaries — wait for no man. At least, they'll blow you up afterwards. I am very glad I have spoken to you candidly. I should have gone away under a complete misapprehension otherwise. I tell you what—if I can be of any use by way of advice or action, use me. And I tell you what besides, as I am writing to Harding Hanaper, I shall mention your name." Fermor made a faint protest. "Don't misunderstand me," said Sir Hopkins. "It is merely for precaution's sake, and binds you to nothing."

"O, sir," said Fermor, "you are so kind and so thoughtful to me. *Indeed* I wish I had consulted you earlier. The whole thing is such a complica-

tion. For instance, last night there was a man who I believe was attached to her before—before——”

“Before *you* came,” said Sir Hopkins, smiling. “Of course—every one in his turn. You may, perhaps, be predecessor to some one else.”

“A rough, rude, heavy fellow—Hanbury,” continued Fermor. “And he, it seems, chose to bring me to account as *their* champion. I could not put up with *that*, and of course I *had* to repress him, very firmly, and with some strong language. I showed him, I think, that I was not to be intimidated.”

“Quite right,” said Sir Hopkins, “quite so. I saw it. It was very gross; and, I tell you, a not uncommon manoeuvre. And you met him with spirit and firmness?”

“Yes, sir,” said Fermor.

“O, then you’ll have him with you this morning.”

“How, sir?” said Fermor.

“*They’ll* send him to make it up, and all that sort of thing. The move failed, you see. I shall be greatly surprised if they don’t. Now, my dear boy, letters, letters! Under-Secretary waiting.”

No wonder that Fermor, for long after, should

think of his relative's powers of foresight, and acuteness of mental vision, with something like reverence—even with awe—for when he reached home, he found, waiting in his room, John Hanbury! Who, exactly as had been prophesied for him, walked up to him with a sort of sad contrition, and said, with a humility that affected the other :

“Fermor, I am sorry for what passed last night. I hope you will not think of it. I can say no more.”

For the moment he was almost affected. It pained him to see this poor rough creature laying himself in the dust so humbly, all through the strength of his unlucky attachment. Through the films of natural vanity, distrusts, suspicions, through which he saw most things, Fermor for a moment got a clear view of this honest bit of self-sacrifice. He grasped Hanbury's hand. “As you say,” he said, “let us think no more of it. I was rough enough myself last night, but have been much put out of late. You don't know how I am worried. We can't always keep a watch over ourselves.”

CHAPTER THE NINTH.

VIOLET'S LITTLE PLOTS.

PAULINE, when Violet had come down, was astonished at the change. Violet's eyes were as glittering as before, and she went about with a nervous vivacity, but the look of misery and hopelessness was gone.

Very soon this restlessness had worked itself to a point. "Dear Pauline," she said, as if asking a favour, "I am thinking of going out for a walk to the library (my head is so hot), and taking Jane."

"To be sure, darling," said her sister, delighted that she was taking interest in such a thing as a library. "The very thing, and get yourself a

nice amusing book." She assumed—this delicate sister—that Violet would prefer going without her, for they could not avoid coming to that one subject, and therefore she did not propose herself as a companion. But this was really the first step in Violet's little conspiracy. She had a curious and irresistible instinct that she would meet with some one of the characters with whom her little plot was to deal. And this is often a very sure and faithful instinct. Jane, who always associated every progress outside the house indistinctly with Mr. Bates, attended her with alacrity.

The librarian—gentlemanly and conversational—took a great interest in her, and had put by (the tenderest little attention that was in his power) a new and choice story for her. Thus, unhappily, was her business transacted only too speedily; and then Violet, indifferently skilled in all the devices of social life, began to talk against time, and therefore a little wildly.

The librarian talked professionally, as it were, and was glad of the opportunity. "There's a book," he said, "I am keeping for Major Carter, 'The Virgins of Mayfair;' they say it is by Mrs. Mackenzie Tollemache. He is to call for it him-

self at one o'clock. The major knows the world so well," added the librarian, with a smile.

But her instinct was not to fail her, for presently she saw John Hanbury, with a heavy gloom upon his face, smoking a cigar dismally, lounging past with heavy steps. He saw her in a second, and his face became a conflagration. Now, Violet felt, was the moment to get out her heavy cloak and dark lantern, if she ever *was* to be a conspirator. Hanbury had passed irresolutely, and then, turning, saw Violet's soft face looking out at him with encouragement and sympathy. He came back as if he had been called. Violet welcomed him with a warmth almost extravagant. Jane was looking on from the inner shop, and looking on with approval. So Violet had made her first step in the character of a conspirator.

Hanbury was confounded, and almost agitated at his reception. Strange thoughts came tumbling tumultuously through his brain, wild dreams for the future rose in his head. Could it be that she had at last seen *that other* in his true colours?

"Shall I take this?" said the library messenger, now going out and pointing to "The Virgins of Mayfair," who were on the ground bound together

with strong twine. "No, no," said the librarian ;
"I see the major crossing."

Instantly Violet had become almost coquettish. "We never see you now, Mr. Hanbury," she said, softly. "You *used* to spare us an hour sometimes. But that was long ago." This was not very skilful, but it was wonderful for Violet, and did excellently for Hanbury, who could have prostrated himself there on the well-worn boards of the library.

Major Carter was looking in at the window at the title-pages of the new books.

"Indeed," said Hanbury, "you are *most* kind, only too good ; but I thought——"

Now entered Major Carter, fresh from his window studies. He was astonished and delighted to meet Miss Violet. Little did he know the pleasure that was in store for him when he crossed over. Could he help her to choose a book ? "You have kept that new thing for me, Mr. —— ; all thanks. This is," to Violet, "one of Mrs. Tolle-mache's, whom we *all* know, so you can imagine why I was dying to see it."

In the presence of this skilful player Violet felt her histrionic power a little chilled, but she thought

of what was before her, and set herself to work with wonderful purpose and resolution. "No," she said; "Mr. Hanbury has always helped me. He will choose me something, for I believe he knows my taste." Poor Violet. This was spoken awkwardly enough, but it imposed on the two gentlemen. "I must go back now," added she, getting even bolder in her little strategy. "I am going to ask Mr. Hanbury to see me home. Jane has business—marketing, and what not."

Hanbury, scarcely knowing whether he was living or breathing, glowed a delighted consent, and this wonderful Violet, whom some fairy had metamorphosed into a perfect little intrigante, hurried into the back portion of the shop, and whispered her maid that she must walk after Major Carter and watch if he went near Brown's-terrace.

Hanbury was to know strange fluctuations in his treatment, for he had scarcely walked a hundred yards in this new tumult of happiness, when Violet apparently began to weary of his society. The worn lines began to show in her face, just as invisible writing ink comes out before a fire. "I won't take you any farther," she said; "indeed, no.

It is very kind of you to have come. Please leave me here. Do. I *must* go by myself."

And thus Hanbury was left gasping in the road, quite dazed, and with his heart all filled with grief. Still there was consolation—something to turn over and think of, in that incomprehensible change of manner.

Later in the day the maid came back, after being detained rather longer than her mission required. She brought good news, however, for the major had gone straight to Brown's-terrace, no doubt charged with intelligence.

Joyfully our Violet flew up-stairs, began to smoothe her hair, and work at personal decoration. The excitement of both night and day had given a brilliancy to her face. Ribbons, lace, dress, ornaments, all of the best, were got out, for it was now certain that Fermor, having quaffed the elixir, would come—come in excitement and with all speed.

Her sister saw the change with delight and wonder, but forbore to ask a single question—even to put out a hint. She ran up to her mother with the good news, and to enjoin caution.

"Violet has a little mystery of her own, poor

child. It is all going well again, I can see. He has been writing, and, I suspect, will be here in a moment. I knew it was some mistake. Don't let us notice anything, mother dear, and I shall watch for Louis and warn him against any of his blunt speeches."

Mrs. Manuel, whose face was all arid and worn with old private sorrows, where tears seemed to have sunk for themselves watersheds and gullies, smiled with some pleasure. Such news was lighting up *her* darkness.

Violet, below, was setting the room in order over and over again, to do honour to the king that was coming in state. Thus busy, she talked, and with a spontaneousness quite unusual.

"I was thinking, Pauline," she said at last, from the window, and with her face to the garden, "of a little plan, a little scheme of *my own*"—an announcement received with genuine delight by her sister.

"To be sure, dear," she said; "let us hear it. Mamma will be delighted."

"I want," said Violet, still at the window, "to—to—give a little party. You know we have been here so long, and never——"

Pauline answered with genuine wonder. "A party, dear! Good gracious! No—why should we do that?"

"O, we must!" said Violet, turning round and hastily crowding a number of reasons together. "It is expected. We ought to have done it long ago. I am sure they say so. O, Pauline, indeed, *indeed* we must; and—and—I should so like it."

"But this is so odd," said her sister, still wondering. "I never thought you cared for it. And mamma, you know, she could hardly bring herself to——"

"O, *she* will," said Violet. "Indeed, we must do it," she added, piteously; "it is the only thing I would ask. Indeed, you will help me!"

Sisterly instinct had now at last divined that something more was asked for than a mere party, and Pauline was presently as eager as Violet.

But the shadows of evening began to gather, and she sat and made a pretence of reading, then of settling again, then of imaginary searches and inquiries in her own room as imaginary, until the day was fairly gone. Then she became exhausted. The excitement could not carry her on. Light lines on her face began to come out, and

she turned to her fairy godmother quite hopeless and helpless.

That counsellor was not without ready comfort. She wrapped her consolation up in the pithy saying about the time it required to build the city of Rome. The ways of "gentlemen" were almost as inscrutable as those of Providence. Certain experiences connected with Mr. Bates had almost established the same truth. Leave it to time. To-morrow, miss, we should see. Rome was not, &c.

But, the king was not to come *that* day. He had *not* drank of the elixir, which might be accepted as a reason, such as it was. Major Carter, posting away to see him, had found him out. The king had gone in next door in all his glory to console yet another maid. While Violet was keeping her weary evening watch, with the greys and dusks descending about her like clouds, her lord was sitting beside a Moabitish woman, who had also, from the old instinct, decked herself for his coming.

Their song was to this effect.

"Shall you ever come back again?" said he.
"Scarcely, I should say. Chance rarely brings

friends again together at a place of this sort, at the same time. No, you shall be at the west when I shall be at the east. It is always the way."

"We are to go to the south of France," she said, speaking this to the corner of her dress. "Papa likes quiet and retirement. We shall become regular rustics, and live among the vines and honest peasants. You, we are told, are to have a different sort of life, out among the Eastern tribes, conquering and ruling. Something splendid and exciting."

"No," said Fermor, with some embarrassment; "nothing is settled as yet. Of course I might, if I chose."

"And you *will* choose," said she, timidly, but looking at him. "I am sure of it; I told papa so this morning."

Fermor smiled. There was a refreshing naturalness about this girl that was always piquant. A new view at every turn of the road. "That would suit my nature, I suppose," he said, inquiringly, "ruling and conquering?"

She dropped her eyes again. Then, after a moment, looked at him. "I—I think so," she said.

"Quite right," he said, approvingly. (He had always a sort of paternal manner to her.) "Well answered! I should like being captain over slaves, in opening their brute intellects. I *would* relish the barbarous splendour of that country. No better background for anything like mind or intellect."

"You should go," she said, eagerly. "We should so like to hear of you."

"But what would you hear of me?" he said. "The ordinary routine account."

"No, no," she said; "something more. I know you would be famous."

"At least," he said, "you are anxious to get me out of the country. That is the fairest construction I can put on what you say."

"No, indeed," she said; "you misjudge me. If you *must* go, surely the south of France is as far removed from India—at least to all intents and purposes—as England. You will never come *that way*."

(This "nature" is really charming, he thought, because she makes no pretence to anything else.)

"We never know how things may turn out," he said. "I could no more tell where I shall be in three months' time than I could the age of the—"

age of the moon. It may be England, India,—perhaps the south of France,” he added, smiling. “It is all on the cards.”

She smiled too. “You don’t mean *that*?” she said.

“I can mean nothing,” said he, importing one of his mysterious aphorisms, “where I know nothing. I confess you have read me right in one point. I *do* feel a call towards India. It is the country for me; and but for the absurd forms and formulas of our diplomatic service—No matter. I have not at *all* dismissed the notion, I assure you. People someway seem to *expect* me to go there. I have really very moderate abilities, which I am sure they overrate. I dare say, in the end, I shall have to go. But remember—the south of France is on the road to India.”

“O, how charming it would be,” said she, in one of her unconventional little bursts of delight. “Some morning, perhaps, we should hear of a strange gentleman at the gate, and we should be wondering, and then it would turn out to be you. Though, indeed, I should know for certain that it *was* you as soon as I heard there was a stranger.”

“And do you mean to say,” said Fermor, “that

a morning call from a mere conventional being like myself—finding you, too, among all the attractions of the sweet south—would give you any pleasure? because, if so——”

“*Indeed* it would,” she answered readily, and without hesitation.

Fermor had expected, in the course of nature, a little confusion and dropping of the eyes; still it was a bit of nature, and she was really delightful for that. It was like real fresh eau-de-Cologne after all manner of heavy perfumes. She was so simple and so natural, he could have gone on “playing” on her for an hour more, with fresh entertainment, only he was obliged to go.

“Good-by! good-by!” he said, rising. “As I say, nothing is settled, and you must be prepared for that morning call in the south. For I suspect I shall *have* to rule over the Easterns after all. It is better than decay in a country like this. There is something grand, as you say, in being a satrap. I feel a call to it: and so,” added Fermor, gliding into a tender cadence, “good-by, dear Miss Carlay. We have had some pleasant hours together; at least *I* have.”

The girl said nothing. Fermor held her hand a

moment, let it go suddenly, and then left the room. Without any "pronounced" sensation in this farewell, there was still a secret hint as of something dramatic and touching. Fermor's "exquisite steering" (his expression to himself) had given this tone to the situation. At the door he came full on Mr. Carlay.

"We are going away," said the latter, "as no doubt you have been told. I know very few, and scarcely one that I care for here; so it is not a great sacrifice for me. *She* would like to remain."

"Then why go?" said Fermor.

"This air of the south has been ordered for her. The winter is drawing on. And what is to become of you? I am told you are to go to India full of honours."

"Well, so they say," said Fermor, greatly gratified with this universal nomination of himself to office.

"Well, I am sure you will succeed. Write to us—to me. You have done great good in this house; you have really cheered *her* up. It was kind of you to come in and talk with her. A grim stiff fellow like me is no companion for a girl."

"Don't mention it, sir," said Fermor, in high

good humour. "It was a pleasure to myself. It is rarely one finds so cultivated a mind."

"If," said the other—"if it should ever come to pass—and we hear how short a way money goes in India—if—and I can assure you I don't want to offend; but I am a rude rough fellow——"

"I understand," said Fermor, "perfectly. And to show that I take it as it is meant, I *do* promise to avail myself of your goodness. I do appreciate such kind thoughts, rely upon it. Perhaps one of these days I may look in upon you in France—who knows?"

This concluded his farewell with father and daughter. The whole scene quite filled his mind. The Manuel family faded out and became small figures at a distance. At all events, there was nothing pressing. Thus do painters, by heightening the colours in one portion of a picture, dim, without touching, other parts near them.

The Eastport season was indeed drawing to a close. Sharp blasts were coming from the sea, charged with daggers and razors. The polite world was flitting away. Every day, at the newly-opened railway station, porters had busy work of it, labelling dark and heavy boxes for "London." And

in first-class windows was seen a crowd of appeals, growing daily more frequent, crying out piteously, "To Let," "To Let." Every one was eager to be gone, once the rush had set in; and the air was filled with declarations, "We are going on Monday," "We are going on Tuesday," &c. &c. The haste and hurry was almost indecent, and not unmixed with contempt. It was as though some family with whom they had been intimate had been suddenly discovered to be unsuitable to know, and was to be "dropped" with all speed. Next year, when the season came on, the people would be bowing and greeting Eastport again with the pleasant effrontery of worldlings.

Thus, in a day or two, had Sir Hopkins Pocock, C.B., passed away, his despatch-box being put under the seat. Thus, also, in a week or two, was Lady Laura Fermor and her daughters busy upstairs putting up their camp-kettles and knapsacks, once more getting ready for the road.

The Eastport sea-breezes, and the comparative inactivity of this campaign, had not been without profit for the veteran commander. If it had been otherwise it would have made little difference, as, however worn and footsore, she would have marched

out of the place with the same spirit. Yet, though no serious operations had been undertaken, some successes of a substantial order had crowned their arms. It did, indeed, seem likely that what might be called a fort—Fort Piper—was about to fall. That stronghold, it will be remembered, was a sort of child, but of good expectations, and well worthy sitting down before and investing in all form.

The ripe charms of Alicia Mary had affected him. "Good God!" said Fermor, with strong disgust, as he met the child day after day in his mother's apartments. "You don't mean to say you are thinking of *that* infant! I declare it would be a sin—a crime! I could not stand by and look on. His friends ought to interfere. I am ashamed of you, Alicia."

For once the veteran sergeant lost command of her temper. This was tampering with the ranks. Her voice trembled. "None of this," she said, walking up to him with a look he did not soon forget; "it is easy for *you* to make remarks. You must not interfere with the girls. No one asks *you* to give yourself trouble, nor, indeed, *have* you put yourself out in any way. We have had work enough of it, without help from any one, and I won't suffer any in-

terference *now*. You understand; you have done for yourself in the way that suits you best, and no one has said a word to you. It is only fair that we should have *our* way. There!"

Fermor withdrew in some disorder to the ground he had occupied before. The Boy found mysterious attraction in Alicia Mary, who was kind and encouraging after an almost maternal manner. He positively adored her. There were guardians in the way, it is true—providentially no Chancery, which had been fatal. And it was to sit down before these guardians that Lady Laura was now preparing to march. A ridiculous disparity, said the malicious. Disparity, when he was next brother to Sir Thomas! Disparity, when the Sir Thomas alluded to hath not, and ought not to have (on reliable guarantees), any children! Disparity, when the estates were worth so much! Away with these puerile objections. Were not these sufficient answers?

Violet kept her mournful watches; only the inspiration of her maid sustained her. Fermor came in a day or so. He diffused joy over the mansion; but he was moody, and "short,"—lowering symptoms; Violet welcomed him, after the first shock,

with some pleasure. The elixir was working. Pauline did not come down to him ; her presence, she thought, would only cloud the air more. Very soon his grievances came to the surface. He had observed, he said, that "your friend, Mr. Hanbury," had come back. This was more of the elixir. What did *that* mean, pray ? Violet, a little flurried, called up her presence of mind. She did not know, she said. She supposed he had business, or some such reason. With a voice that trembled a little, she added, that he was "very good," and that people seemed to like him so.

"O, that is it," said Fermor, getting up, and walking over to the window ; "I see." Though a little terrified, Violet was pleased, for here were signs of the elixir. Fermor turned round smiling with grim scorn. "I see !" he repeated. He was thinking how this poor child was inconsistently showing "the little game" of the family.

The little faint lines in her face, and her secret suspense, struck him with a little pity. "That was all a mistake, you know, the other night. I came back as fast as I could, and there was such a crowd, and when I got to the other end, you were gone."

This was a noble amende; the view that Violet in her heart of hearts had clung to all along. He was a hero again.

"O, how good of you," she said, in a tumult of foolish gratitude. "I knew that was the reason. I said so, all along."

"Yes," said he; "I suppose there were plenty of persons to take the worse view."

Now was there an opportunity.

"O, by the way," she said, with a sort of nervous coquetry, "I want you to do something for me. I have a plan—a great little scheme."

"A great little scheme?" said Fermor, smiling at this description. "Well!"

"It is all my own plan entirely. I am going to give a little party."

Fermor started. "A party! Give a party! In the name of Providence, why should you do that?"

"O, it's all my own idea," said Violet. "I should so like it."

"It's simply absurd," said Fermor; "a party when everybody's out of the place; and in this little room."

"But it's to be a *little* party," said Violet, coming up to him, and now filled with misgivings as to

the policy of her proposal. "Only a few, I assure you."

"That of course you can arrange as you like," he said; "I only give my opinion. If you take *my* advice, you would not think of such a thing. It is at least laughable. It will only end in failure."

"O, if you please," said she, imploringly, "my heart is so set on this little scheme."

"Good gracious!" said he, "am I preventing it? Do just as you like. I only give my advice."

"But you will come? If you were to know how I have set my heart on it."

"On my coming?" said Fermor, smiling in spite of himself. "Well, I suppose the great little scheme must go on."

He was provoked afterwards that he had given way to this levity, or good humour. It took away from his sense of injury. But he left happiness behind. The maid, who was fairy godmother, found herself embraced, and overpowered with a burst of confidence, everything was going on so prosperously.

A week more, and more fashionable Israelites had gone out of the place. There were no traces

even of the place where the Laura Fermor tents had been pitched a few days back. The fashionable London Fremdenblatt had announced them at their hotel, in Dover-street. Sir Hopkins, said the same register, was staying at Wycherly's, St. James's-square, genteel and costly chambers, well known to colonists.

Every one was arriving somewhere in Town; and Eastport, abandoned and forsworn, began to have very much the look of the field where a gay circus has flourished temporarily, where the horses had galloped round, and the scarlet and tinsel fluttered, and the crowd shouted, but where now there was only the mark of a worn sawdust ring.

Fermor fumed against this abandonment. Things, as regards his personal affairs, had settled into a dead level. There was a lull. But he would have preferred something that he might work against. He went to see the Manuels fitfully, and bestowed some gloom and mystery on them. The brother seldom appeared to him, and when he did, he seemed to be held, as it were, in a leash. But Violet, still anxious and still fluttering, said to all their gentle remonstrances, "Leave it to me. Do, *do* now. We shall settle it all the

night of the little party." This was indeed her plank.

The good woman in the wood, with a good deal of the pride which successful advice brings, had forecasted prodigious issues from this night. It was understood that it was to bring forth a new and perfect understanding, a resolution of all difficulties, even the naming of a near and certain day for the nuptials, and universal happiness and delight. "Leave it all to me! *I* know," said Violet, with a little air of mystery. And she had now come to brood anxiously over this eventful night, as though it were finally to determine her fate, as, indeed, it was destined to do.

Fermor, too, was waiting another event. Sir Hopkins had said he would write to him from London as soon as everything was settled, and "he saw his way finally." Someway Fermor had begun to have a restless feeling, though he had no grounds for it, that this paper would concern him eventfully. Yet the letter did not come. His family had not written either. "I suppose they think I may be treated any way and any how now," he said, bitterly. "I am a sort of cast-off, it would seem, to be dead and buried at once.

They assume they have got rid of me now for good, and now that no profit may be made of me. Take care. I may disagreeably surprise them yet."

But there was yet another letter expected which did not come. Major Carter had said to him, "I have written, as you wished it, to old Foley at Dunkirk. He is the most wonderful 'gather-ups' of old stories in nature. Quartered in Spain, as I told you. He knows everything about everybody, and, depend upon it, we shall have a very full and curious letter. Now, my dear sir, don't say a word. I take this all on myself. I have no right to say anything of my own suspicions. I feel it is going beyond what I ought to have done. The only thing I can do is to support what I say, or own that I have been wrong. *You* have no part in it whatever. I have forced it on you."

Thus it came to a certain Monday, for which evening Miss Manuel had asked a few friends to tea and music.

CHAPTER THE TENTH.

FAUST AND MEPHISTOPHELES.

THAT day of the Manuel little party — and Violet had taken all its responsibilities on herself — seemed almost to trail by. Fermor was still fretting against what he thought the “unmeaningness” of the whole affair. Why, however, should they mind *him*? It was only to be expected that they would take their own course. No letters by post that morning. He had a good mind not to go at all, the thing was so absurd; but then if he got unwell and stayed away, he would be talked of, and asked about, and looked at, which would be yet more absurd. Above all, there would be a

scene—tears and injured looks, and *that* kind of pressure.

Hanbury had gone away for a few days, but had come back express the night before. His passage—some hundred and twenty pounds' worth—had been taken and paid for out, but the splendid fast steamer had sailed out of Southampton a week before. Groaning chests, ranked under the title of "heavy luggage," had been put on board a sailing ship, and the sailing ship had weighed anchor and dropped down the Thames, so that was lost as well as the passage money. He "sold off" many things, furniture, dogs, horses—among others, the famous brute that had won the fatal race—hurriedly, and at a sacrifice. So here was further loss. Yet he did not care. He was beginning actually to live again, to breathe, to stretch his arms. He was seen to walk fast and excitedly, not to slouch along. His hopelessness was being mixed up with uncertainty—which was an improvement; just as a condemned prisoner is encouraged when he knows that powerful exertions are being made for a reprieve.

Major Carter, who had got letters that morning, met him in the little street. Hanbury was

full of importance. The major turned back with him.

“A great day for Eastport,” said the major, cheerily. “We are all so interested in our friend’s little adventure. *Quod faustum, &c.*, you know the quotation”—which Hanbury did not. “They are charming girls—what I call a sweetness about them.”

Hanbury turned on him eyes that almost swam. “Indeed they are,” he said; and out of gratitude he could not but add: “and I know, I am sure, they like you.”

“I dare say Miss Violet does,” said the other, “I don’t think Miss Pauline quite so much. She, Miss Violet, is so soft and winning; like the flower she is called after, so retiring and delicate. Do you know, my dear Hanbury, I often get uneasy when I think of the rough east winds—you understand me?” Hanbury sighed heavily. “And that, I will confess to you,” added the major, lightly touching the arm of his friend, “is the only thing that gives me a little uneasiness on her score—I mean, our friend Fermor, who, though he has a fine natural disposition, and is full of the best

points, is scarcely suited—you understand. And now, do you know, it has occurred to me lately, that some such idea has lately come upon her gentle mind; and it has been remarked," added the major, with mystery, "by others, too."

Hanbury became irresolute. "Fermor," he said, "is indeed scarcely suited. I doubt if he understands her."

"He is really a fine character," said the major, warmly, "and is my friend. But I tell you, candidly, I never liked this match. He is for the world. She is for quiet domestic happiness. Poor sweet child! I can see she is even now turning back to old days. Another sort of nature would have suited her better. It is too late now to go back."

"Yes," said Hanbury, gloomily.

"But," said the major, "I am very glad of this opening, for I have wished to speak to you, and *you* are not a man to misunderstand frankness. It would not do—it would not answer—and would be scarcely fair——"

"How!" said Hanbury, colouring.

"I say, I wish it could be undone, but it can't. No, it lies on you. You must discourage it as

much as you can. She is young and impulsive, and cannot hide her feelings. But you must be generous, and make the sacrifice."

Clumsily disguised pleasure flashed in Hanbury's eyes. He could hardly contain himself. "You know," said he, confidentially, "I owe nothing to Fermor. He used me unfairly. It is an open game between us. Besides," he added, with pride, "if I could only save her——"

"Hush!" said the major, "this is all in confidence. I merely threw out the hint. Fermor would be in a fury if he knew it. I must go. Think no more of it, I beg. We shall meet at the little festival. Au revoir!"

Hanbury went his way with all his spirits, soul, heart, everything bounding and springing within him. He hurried tumultuous to the Manuels. He found them in confusion. Violet and her confidential maid were out. She was almost, Hanbury found out, in a sort of light fever; for the crisis was now coming on. Her sister had noted even a little wildness. She was wrought up to the highest pitch, for she had given out, as it were by proclamation, that this night was to end the whole—to bring everything to a splendid issue. By this

charm, she had with difficulty laid that sleeping lion, her brother.

Hanbury, roaming about the little town, soon lighted on her. He came up to her shyly, yet exuberantly. She welcomed him according to her new tactics; led him about as her escort to many shops, and chattered all the while—all the while, too, looking eagerly round to the right and left for spectators. These she soon found. For Young Brett passed by, and looked after them, wondering; and Major Carter passed by, also wondering; before whom Hanbury drew himself up with pride. But Fermor, who was most desired, did not see that little progress.

He had paced his room a great deal that night. He was now feeling the monotony of desertion. He had no excitement to keep him up. "To be wasting in this place," he thought; "and a life like mine, by my own stupid folly, to be flung away." Rarely, indeed, in his life, had Fermor made so honest a confession of incapacity.

It was coming to four o'clock, and darkening gradually. Post came about five. He had bade his man, Mr. Bates, to be sure to go down before the time and fetch his letters. "Of course there

will be no letters," he said, "because I want them. I suppose they think, *now*, I am not worth writing to."

By-and-by dropped in Young Brett, who, on the mention of Violet, or her "little party," told eagerly how he had just met her "with that fellow Hanbury." He remarked that that gentleman was plucking up wonderfully. He wondered what he (Hanbury) "was at" in "hanging about" in this way.

"I know," said Fermor, starting up and beginning to pace the room. "I understand it. It's no matter now, but it will all come right in time."

Some little friendliness on Young Brett's part being repelled rather roughly, that youth went away scared. "We shall meet to-night," he said, as a farewell.

"Well!" said the other, "I suppose we shall. We meet now, and may meet to-morrow. There is no need of telling each other such good news."

"No! no! of course," said poor Brett, colouring. Later came Major Carter.

"I met your friend Hanbury in great spirits."

"I suppose," said Fermor, "in Miss Violet's

company. What is the meaning of this?" he added, violently. "Do they want to set me up for the whole town to laugh at? It is outrageous. People coming in here every minute telling me what they see." All Fermor's injuries came rushing on him. "I'm not to be played on in this fashion. To be talked of by the low tea-table gossips of a low place like this. How *dare* they attempt to be playing these petty tricks on me! I tell you what, Carter; I have a good mind to give the whole tribe a lesson."

"No, no," said the major; "I acquit her—she is too much of a child, too quiet and harmless."

"Who mentioned her, pray," said Fermor, becoming calm. "Did I? Then pray don't say so. Too much of a child! There's a nice alliance for a man that might rise in the world. A man that at this moment might be high in India, and talked of. I declare, Carter, I could sit and cry when I think of all I have lost and been obliged to give up, and for such a set. You know what I am, and what is in me. Isn't it a cruel thing? And Sir Hopkins knows, yet I must say has behaved

nobly; but what could he do? 'A child,' and 'perfectly harmless,' in India! And after all this, to dare to be playing their wretched little games upon me."

This was a tremendous burst for Fermor.

"I must say," said the major, calmly, "their proceedings are quite beyond me. It is a game, I tell you candidly. I have reason to know it."

"You have?" said Fermor, eagerly; "show it to me. Prove it."

The major shook his head. "I can only say," he said, "that I met that very Mr. Hanbury with, as you say, Miss Violet Manuel—and had a little talk with him previously."

"He was in spirits," said Fermor.

"How did you know that?" said the major, astonished. "So he was. He threw out some hints. You know he is rather of an open nature. By the way, he seemed to hint at a sort of justification of himself, as he said you had used him very ill."

"I suppose so," said Fermor. "What is he aggrieved about? Good gracious! is not this a free country? Who forces her, or who is forcing?"

If they want him, let them take him, in God's name. Let her say so at once, and let them have done with these wretched tricks. I'm sick of them."

This was the irritation of, say, a month back, all burst forth at one moment. The major paused. "I am glad you have spoken to me so frankly," said he. "I should advise some decided course. A clear, final, and positive explanation. I shall come here again, late, if you will allow me."

The major was gone, the darkness was coming on yet stronger. It was past five o'clock, and here now was his man, Bates, entering with the lamp, and the post. Absolutely a whole mail of letters for Captain Fermor. "And here, sir," added Bates, "is a letter as was just left by Miss Manuel's maid." The demeanour of Miss Manuel's maid, had she to make such an announcement with a reference to Mr. Bates, would have been conscious and awkward. But Mr. Bates was a soldier and unmoved. Fermor, however, gave preference to the regular mail.

One from Lady Laura. One from his army agent. Several from tailors, perfumers, besides

circulars, and a large envelope directed in Sir Hopkins's well-known official hand. Nervously, though he expected nothing from it, Fermor drew his chair in and began to read. It was very closely written, and with a heart which beat quicker and quicker with every line, he read it through. Towards the end, he rose and took a short hurried march backward and forward, then read on ; when he had finished, there was a strange look in his eyes.

He rang the bell. "Go for Major Carter at once," he said to Mr. Bates ; "do not lose a moment."

He did not open Lady Laura's epistle, though it contained news that young Piper had, the night before, offered himself to Alicia Mary at the hotel ; nor the mixed crowd of tailors' and other tradesmen's. He read his relative's letter over again.

The major came. He had had a letter, too, from the same writer, but he did not mention it. Another time he would have been all amazement, delight, and surprise. Now he took the letter gravely which Fermor put into his hand.

“Read it out,” said Fermor.

He dropped into a chair, and the major, leaning his face over the lamp, read out the letter :

“Sunday Evening.

“MY DEAR CHARLES,—I am starting, surrounded by boxes and packages, but must find a moment to write to you on a very important matter.

“I have just heard of the death of old Colin Mackenzie, who has been treasurer of my government for the last forty years. The place is in my gift, and must be worth at the very least fifteen hundred a year. As my first bit of patronage, I offer it to you.

“You must think of this seriously, and decide *at once*. The little office I spoke of before was not, I admit, sufficient to tempt a man of parts to change his life; but this is a different question. The position is very delicate, considering the way you are situated. You will do me the justice to say that I never, by persuasion or advice, have attempted to interfere with your plans of life; but, on this occasion, I must speak plainly. This

is really a great opening; it may lead to all sorts of things; and, if I were in your place, I would not hesitate a second; but it is for you to decide.

“As for that family for whom you seem to have a sort of infatuation, you know my opinion. If I had time, I could tell you some little matters I have picked up here. As for the child herself, I would pity her, if I did not think she was a little too clever. My dear boy, these things occur every day. Young St. Rouser—Lord Nimmo’s eldest—behaved badly, as it is called, to Vansittart’s daughter, and there were tears and broken hearts; but in a week she had accepted old Bob Major of the Blues. She had been *protecting* herself all the while.

“Or again, why be in a hurry? If you cannot live without this soft innocent, why not put it off a year or so, until you look about you? The thing is common enough. She can do, I suppose, as other young ladies have done before, and her people have no right to be taking extra airs on themselves. My dear Charles, you are a man of sense, and I have no right to tell you to do this, or do that; but you *must decide at once*, as the post is for some one else, and the appointment must be made before

I go out. I shall wait one day—twelve hours—at Paris, for your answer by telegraph. Direct to the Hôtel Mirabeau.

“Yours truly,

“HOPKINS POCOCK.

“P.S.—The packet leaves Marseilles on Friday at noon. If you accept, you would have almost time to sail with me. Tuesday, London (arrange with War-office—sell your commission. You will find a note at my rooms for Sir Charles, one of my oldest friends); Wednesday, Paris; Thursday, Marseilles. You will find me at the Empereur. I have just met old Lord Welbeck on the stairs.”

Major Carter lifted his face from the lamp. There was a pause for a moment; then he said, “A kind, sensible letter. A judicious letter.”

“But,” said Fermor, “assuming all that, what am I to do?”

“I should say you had no choice. It is all decided for you here,” said the major, tapping the letter. “Good gracious, Fermor!” he continued, suddenly becoming warm, “what are you about? Are you going to let this chivalrous sort of indulgence for a set of people—forgive me—who

have treated you infamously—yes, infamously—wreck your whole life? I can't stand by and see it; I can not. Your friends must interfere, even at the risk of offending you."

"Yes, yes," said Fermor, hastily, "you are right. They have no title to expect anything from me."

"It is splendid, a magnificent opening," said the major; "what I always prophesied."

"Yes," said Fermor, absently, "they deserve nothing from me—nothing. The only thing is that poor, poor girl."

"Poor girl!" said Carter, with a meaning look that conveyed volumes; "but no matter. Besides, what does Sir Hopkins say? Could anything be more delicate, considerate? Is there any hurry?"

"To be sure. No—certainly," said Fermor, hastily.

"I tell you what," said Carter, slowly, "you should go without delay. This very night. The express passes through at midnight."

Fermor started a little guiltily. Perhaps some such notion had been in his thoughts.

"Yes," said the other, quickly, "the best, the kindest, and most charitable course. I know what

your own generous instincts would suggest. But it is time that your friends, if they have any influence, should interfere, and act for you."

"But that poor Violet," said Fermor, moving about restlessly.

"It is of *her* we are thinking, are we not?" said the major. "Is it not best to spare her the agitation, the fuss, and all the rest of it? It is the best opportunity you could have. It is like a providence. They have their little party (a woman's mind is easily filled), and their music, and our friend—er—Mr. Hanbury."

"Ah, true!" said Fermor; "quite right. I did not think of that. I really begin to think it would be all for the best."

"Now that is sensible, and manly, and, I must say, most considerate. If you would care for it, we could go together. I have business that will take me to Town later, so it is only anticipating."

"O, thanks, thanks," said Fermor; "I should so like it." He had been rather shrinking from the gloomy journey by himself.

"Is it settled then? Yes? Very well, I shall be back in an hour," said Major Carter.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH.

VIOLET'S PARTY.

FERMOR, left to himself, was in a whirl of excitement. His heart actually beat as he thought of the daring move he was about to make. Still he shrank from it ; it seemed *ungentlemanly*. Above all, he thought of Violet's anxious face, appealing piteously. The crust of the fashionable world had not yet so wholly covered up his heart. For a moment he thought there was "no hurry," and that the most generous course was the best. But as soon as he had taken this view, he began—what is not uncommon with uncertain minds—to see the merits of the opposite course. It was quixotic ; they were provident adventurers looking after their

interests, and, above all, there was that soft Violet skilfully furnishing herself with a useful reserve in case of his failure. And thus he swung round indignantly to the other view. Then, through the clouds, broke out the soft, appealing face of Violet, and her "little ways," and before he had done with that vision the major returned. He found Fermor sitting in the chair by the lamp, just as he had left him. The major had on his travelling-cap and cloak.

"All packed?" he said. "Not much time—half-past eight."

"I don't know *what* to do," said Fermor, impatiently. "It does seem so heartless, does it not? Poor, poor girl; when they tell her in the morning!"

"These feelings are most creditable," said the major, calmly. "I quite sympathise with them. But recollect what Sir Hopkins says, and what occurred to me too. You only put off—not break off. My dear Fermor, take my word for it, they are well used to this sort of thing—that clever sister and that unlicked brother."

"By the way," said Fermor, starting, "there was a letter came from him; where is it?"

He looked for it and opened it. The major saw Fermor's brow contracting as he read; but did not know, though he guessed, that it was to the old tune, of which that brother was so fond. It hoped imperiously that Fermor would consider the matter seriously, and make up his mind; that these delays were scarcely respectful to his sister, and to them all; that her health was suffering; that young Manuel must be excused if, once for all, he *required* a definite settlement of the whole question that night. The whole key was imperious, and, to Fermor's mind, insolent. It was fatally *mal à propos*.

He tossed down the missive, and said, "My mind is made up. I shall go at once. The colonel is sure to give me leave."

At the moment Fermor flung down the letter, Violet was in her room dressing for the little festival. Her sister and the faithful maid were assisting. The faithful maid was on her knees, busy with the skirt. Both these assistants seemed to know that much depended on the work of this night. The maid having, indeed, foretold certain success, was calm and confident.

Violet was before the glass, flushed and excited. She had not a particle of vanity, but she dressed herself to-night as though she had been another being—say a sister. She was nervously vivacious, and talked with a little rambling. She came down at last, and, as she entered their little drawing-room, felt herself all panting; for she knew she was now embarked fairly in the scheme she had undertaken, and that the time was at hand.

“You look charming,” her sister said, going up to her; “so bright and sparkling, and in such spirits.” The sister had said the same to the maid, and the maid had agreed with the sister.

“Do you think he will like me?” said Violet, in a little rapture. “O, you shall see to-night how he will behave—that is, if I *have* any power with him.” And her face fell a little wearily, for her head was confused and her brain overcharged with little speeches and little tactics, which she had been planning all day.

“He cannot resist you, dearest,” said her sister, kissing her. “He never can.”

The little rooms had been laid out artistically with flowers and modest decorations. There was the foreign air and the foreign touch over all.

There were only a few people to come after all. The fact was, as Fermor had put it, they knew but few, and nearly all those few had left Eastport. After many weary searches and beating up of districts, the entertainment was to resolve itself into such homely elements as the representative clergyman, the representative doctor, the representative solicitor, the representative stray young men and old maiden ladies of the place, shrubs never transplanted, and to whom a little feast of this sort was as water in sultry weather. It was now ten o'clock, and they—and Mr. Hanbury—came with provincial punctuality.

She was very nervous, and thought how she would begin, or what was the first of those painfully planned operations. Her little head was miserably confused. But she had not time to think. For here was the representative clergyman with boundless wife and daughters; and after him the doctor; and, following, the choir of maiden ladies and debatable youths, scarcely boys, nor yet wholly men. Yet these latter were negotiable, and the two or three girls who leavened the community welcomed them cheerfully.

Major Carter and Captain Fermor would, as of

course, come flashing in late. For such brilliants a dull background or setting was necessary. Yet already had a white-faced pendule (a gilt classical lady, sitting on a metallic sofa, with the dial between the legs of the sofa) given a smart "ting," meaning the half-hour. Young Brett, faithful as a terrier, had come, and was keeping close to Miss Manuel, with his faithful terrier eyes fixed on her face. Another officer or two, reluctantly asked by Fermor, gave "an air" to the party, as a master would give a touch to a drawing. Those gentlemen were looking round with the surprise and wonder of Europeans newly landed on an Indian island. They seemed to keep together, too, for protection against the natives. Miss Manuel flitting about, with Young Brett following, tried to break up this confederacy. They would not go away; yet remained under a sense of injury at having been trepanned into the situation. Still Pauline contrived to stir these elements of her little pot-au-feu. She finally broke up the crowd, and brought about temporary alliances between the newly-arrived Europeans and the daughters of the natives. She was at the piano, out of the room, in the room, and everywhere. When the

dial between the sofa legs of the pendule gave out eleven "tings," Violet's face began to show some of the old lines of anxiety. As little processions entered the room, of ices, teas, and cakes, she started and looked towards the door. The opening of her little campaign was being too long delayed. Her heart was growing sick, and she heard a military European say aloud, with the freedom of his tribe, "What the deuce can have become of Fermor?"

Below stairs others had been wondering also, but for this reason: that Mr. Bates, who had readily promised his services with trays and other heavy objects, had appointed to be there at ten "sharp," as he put it. Ten "sharp" had long gone by; it was now more than eleven sharp. No Mr. Bates. Much troubled in mind by this desertion, and laying it to the account of death or accident, the faithful maid, Jane, "slipped on" her bonnet and shawl, and flitted away up to Brown's-terrace. When the door was opened she asked for Captain Fermor. He had gone up to the barracks—taken his things, too—so had Mr. Bates. But a note had been left, which was to be sent up in the morning to Mrs. Manuel's. Here it was.

Wondering, much mystified, and not at all "seeing her way," for so clever a fairy god-mother, the maid went home. She could not get further than that Mr. Bates and Captain Fermor had gone to their barracks for the better facilities of dressing.

By the time she reached home it was long past twelve o'clock. The brother, Louis, had been biting his lips; his heart was full of fury at this public slight, as it appeared to be. Certain of the elderly maidens had said to Pauline in a friendly endearing way, "How was it that Captain Fermor was not here, my dear?" Violet, in such distress that she had flung away all thought of acting, sat with her eyes fixed, worn, and hopeless, on the door, and her figure drooped, her fine clothes hanging about her, Hanbury watching her with a puzzled interest. As the French pendule "tinged" half-past twelve, she started as if it were the bell for execution. Another bell rang at the hall, and she went hurriedly over to the window. It was the maid, and Violet saw the note in her hand. In great trepidation she almost ran out of the room.

At that moment the London express had halted for refreshment forty miles away. Fermor and his

friend Carter, wrapped in cloaks, were standing on the platform, under an illuminated clock.

The maid tripped up-stairs, bonnet and shawl on. Violet met her at the door.

"Give—give it to me," she said, wildly.

"All quite right, miss," said the maid, confidentially; "they will be here presently."

The door was wide open, and every one of the little company—the Europeans, natives, all—heard a slow, sad, agonising cry outside, and Young Brett ran out just in time to catch her in his arms. Many crowded out and saw the hapless child, with what seemed death in her face, and one arm outstretched, holding tightly the fatal sheet of paper.

In a moment they had all poured out on the little landing, with a curiosity which overbore all decent restraint. The girls crushed and rustled to see. "What is it? what was it? what is in the letter? has he broken it off? gone off, has he?" One, indeed, had artfully glanced at the open paper in that now rigid little hand. The story was, indeed, known, or as good as known, in a few seconds.

There lay the poor child in her flowers and tulle, ghastly white, relaxed, and, as it seemed,

dying, supported by Hanbury, who, bursting through the little crowd, had taken her from Young Brett. In a few moments more they carried her up, her little finery all torn into shreds, as it was trod on by those who carried her, amidst the despairing faces of her own family. The crowd, transformed into a "low" crowd by the greed of curiosity, crept half way up the stairs, and listened. But Hanbury, coming down, bluntly and roughly and without ceremony, cleared them out of the house. Only the representative doctor—who had come as a guest—remained professionally.

However terrible such a crisis, shattering the brain even as a blow of a bludgeon does the skull—it seldom kills. Later on that night, or morning, she opened her eyes on the anxious faces gathered round her, shivered, shrieked again, subsided soon into low sighs and quiet moans. The representative doctor then stepped in, and brought such remedies as he could apply.

At that moment the express, a hundred and twenty miles away, was rolling into London. It was a cold morning. The colder grey was breaking. For the last hour, under the pleasant encouragement of the major, Fermor had ceased to

look back, and was beginning to look forward to a gay and brilliant future. The little fibres whose parting had caused him a little pain, were joining again very fast. They had even had some snatches of sleep.

“They must have had a merry night of it,” said the major, as they went to claim their luggage; “much more so than we poor travellers — eh? Goodness! how sleepy I am! And our friend Hanbury has *not* been making good use of his time—eh?”

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH.

A MEETING.

ALL that long day Fermor had hardly time to think. At the Horse Guards—at the Indian outfitter's—at his tailor's—at his family's. He lived almost in cabs. He saw that Sir Charles who was "one of his relative's oldest friends," and was received with unofficial cordiality. "Glad to do anything for my old chum, Sir Hopkins. Besides, you have had no leave for eighteen months. Severe accident, too. Very well. Leave directions with your agents, and we shall take care of you."

Later he saw his mother, Lady Laura.

The "girls" were in the Park with "Young Piper," riding the coursers of Young Piper. That

youth was, as it were, drunk with his infatuation. Lady Laura welcomed her son as though she were an ordinary mother of flesh and blood, gave him a really maternal embrace, and approached nearer to weeping than she had ever done in her life.

“My dear boy,” she said, as he told her his story, “I am indeed proud of you. This is a brave, manly, and sensible course. I always said I admire your resolution and self-denial. I do indeed. Look at that child Piper, that is running after Alicia Mary, like a weak schoolboy. But I said all along that you were following out some little plan of your own; and I was not far out.” Fermor was a little elated with these praises, and had a sort of dim impression that “all along” his hand directed the course of events. “As for the girl—who, I am told, is clever enough—would you, my dear Charles, leave it to me? Shall I write a kind, friendly note, to say the thing must not be thought of for the present, and that if you are both in the same mind when you return, it can all begin again? That is the proper way, Charles, and a very good test it will be of her sincerity. Young Monboddo went to his regiment at Ceylon under exactly such an arrangement with that country girl, Hemans;

but, my dear, when he came back, he found her Lady Nugent."

By the evening he had done a wonderful day's business. He met Major Carter by appointment at Starridge's, the correct bachelor's hotel in Bond-street, and they dined together. At eight they were driving up to the South-Eastern Railway—among the lamps—to go down by the mail to Dover.

"I met," said the major, as they got out, "some common friends to-day. I did not tell you, as it was to be a little surprise for you."

Fermor was glad. He was growing gloomy and morose as he thought of this second night's journey to be taken alone. The major was to stay in London.

"Here they are," said he, as they emerged on the busy platform; and Fermor saw a tall stiff figure in shadow, and a muffled lady on his arm. "Here are our friends," said the major. "Delightful, is it not? Going the same way, too—quite a coincidence."

Perhaps it was. The Carlays were going to the south of France after some days' stay in London. Now, indeed, the gloomy prison-like journey, which he had shrunk from, would become a little

blue boudoir, well lit, comfortable, and cheerful. This simple girl would entertain him with her unconcealed worship. The act of making a journey together is a link of sympathy; for there are common troubles and a common undertaking to be got through together.

And so the bell rang, and the night-mail flew down to Dover, past many pointsmen, who had come out of their hutches on duty, and saw the cozy well-lighted blue chambers flit by; in one of which, Captain Fermor, his knees wrapped in his rug, was stooping over, talking with great animation of voice and gesture to the lady next him. Then came the cold night air on Dover pier, and the Calais packet, and Paris in the grey of the morning, and the great Boulevards, with the trees and the white palaces, and the men in blouses going to work, and the great door of the great hotel, which a portier, who never slept, swung slowly open. Then the sleepy travellers went to their rest—for an hour or so.

Fermor often boasted of his "iron constitution," and by ten or eleven o'clock was asking to see "his Excellency" Sir Hopkins Pocock, who was breakfasting in a private room of the hotel.

The welcome he received from that high public servant was wonderfully cordial. "My dear, dear boy," he said, "this is right, now. I am proud of you. You were made for the service. I knew you would turn out of the right sort. This is our hard fate. We are obliged to pocket our nicest feelings for the public. Breakfasted? No? Ring, please."

Sir Hopkins was a Frenchman in Paris, and could speak French.

They breakfasted together, spent the day very pleasantly going about Paris, Sir Hopkins leaning on his arm; dined at the Three Brothers café; went to the Opera; and walked after the Opera along the Arabian Nights' Entertainment, translated into the Boulevard des Italiens. Fermor felt pensive among these glories, yet was not disturbed in mind—great dreams of ambition were filling his soul.

In the morning they were gone, flying down through the delightful wine countries to Lyons, seeming to breathe the bouquet of Burgundies and other choice vintages as they passed. Delightfully musical names rang in their ears. They were at Lyons that night, and there was light

enough, as they crossed the airy bridge, to see the molten silver of the Rhône below. They slept soundly through the night, and in the morning were breakfasting at the Empereur, at Marseilles. The hum and clatter of the Canebière was under their windows. The gay parti-coloured sails before the shop windows were fluttering below them. The delightful quay of La Joliette was but a few yards away, where the ships of all countries, and the sailors of all countries, and the merchants and the wares, and the voices and the dresses of all, were as gay and bright under the sun as the market scene in Masaniello. The steamer was to sail at noon, as, indeed, were many more steamers, and the commissionnaire was busy in their interest.

"By the way, my dear boy," said Sir Hopkins, picking his teeth, "(I have sent for the cab), I found a letter here this morning. Sent on, you know. It is rather awkward. That post I spoke of—Mackenzie's—you know."

"Yes," said Fermor, nervously. "Good gracious! nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Oh, it will all come right, I am sure. But, it now seems (I don't understand it, I am sure), the home government claims the appointment."

"WHAT?" said Fermor, breaking out hotly.

“Do you mean to tell me that, after all I have done, and been *made* to do——”

“It is outrageous, as you say,” said Sir Hopkins, coolly; “they grasp at everything. The worst part is, they have a sort of a shadow of a title, you see—some arrangement or composition. But, of course, it must be looked into.”

“But,” said Fermor, pacing up and down excitedly, “this is very odd—*looks* very odd, sir! I don’t understand it at all. I have been led away depending on assurances, and now it seems—I must tell you, sir—it has a very curious look, sir.”

“I am not accountable, Charles. You must deal with the home government. It is they who are grasping at your office. You know there is time yet to withdraw.”

“Ah! it is easy, sir, to say there is time to withdraw. At this place—at this time—after sacrificing everything on the faith of this—my word—my honour——”

“Your honour! Good God!” said Sir Hopkins, starting up, and nearly overthrowing his chair. “Your honour, Charles! I *hope* not. O, I hope not. You are not in earnest? No, I see you are not.”

Fermor hung his head. It almost seemed the

bargain of Faust and his Mentor, done in water-colours. There was a pause.

"Well, I don't mean that," he said. "But, sir, sir," he added, sadly, "how *could* you deceive me in this way?"

"Come, come," said Sir Hopkins, in a friendly, hearty manner, "I allow for this excitement, Charles. It is quite natural, and I respect you for it. There are other things going, and we shall make out something for you. You know," added Sir Hopkins, smiling, "it would hardly do to *re-present* yourself after all this fuss and esclandre. As the Frenchmen say, ridicule always kills. I declare," he added, looking down over the balcony, "here is the cab. We really ought to pay the bill now. Yes, and put the final touches to the baggage. Will you look after those servants, like a good boy? Allons."

Fermor bowed his head and said not a word. In a few minutes more he was driven away to the quay, and was on board the Indian mail-boat.

The life on board the Mediterranean steamer was epicurean. There were bright days and cobalt seas. Youth was at the prow, and Pleasure at the helm. It was a gay voyage.

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH.

FADING OUT.

AT the very time that Captain Fermor (who must fill up his day), seated on a camp-stool on deck, was gossiping agreeably to an Indian lady whose husband was below at cards, a dreary desolation and hopeless sorrow was falling on the Manuels' house.

Violet rose up after the shock sooner than her family dared to hope. For a week the very acuteness of the suffering, the excitement and speculation it brought with it, carried her forward. Her sister, worn away with night watching, had whispered desperately, "You must not give way, darling; keep away the thought; fight it off!"

For she knew, if it once seized on her, the talons would sink deeper and deeper, and never let her go. She said this over and over again, with a sort of despair—almost with menace; and Violet, already stunned and exhausted, actually found herself avoiding the thought by a sort of horror.

It was when she came down again into the old routine of life—white, worn, shrunk, and with a timid, cowering look, as if she expected that the blow would come again from some uncertain quarter—that the change was seen in all its dismal force. They could all have wept over her. And when sister and mother clung about her, and pressed her to them, they remarked a sort of insensibility that did not seem to require consolation.

“I am getting better,” she said, looking at them with a little air of resolution. “I am indeed. I shall gradually learn not to think of it, and then it will wear itself out.”

Wear itself out! Alas! There was something busy at *that* work already: thoughts in myriads, seething and bubbling night and day—thoughts of fearful self-reproach, as if this business had been the work of her own folly—thoughts of lost happiness, sheer hopelessness, and a cloud of despair

in the west, coming on slowly, though now no bigger than a man's hand. With such fierce contests the little delicate frame was wearing, though slowly. The sheath was fretting away. And, besides, there was the struggle of concealment—which was, indeed, the only *purpose* that kept her up—not to hurt those kind, miserable, interested faces that were turned to her a hundred times in the day.

The suffering was, indeed, almost divided. On Mrs. Manuel and the others the blow had fallen so tremendously, the crash had been so bewildering, so unexpected, so wholesale and complete, that they did not even dream of looking back, or think of a remedy. They might as well have been looking back after an avalanche, to where their house once stood. It could hardly be called hopelessness, for they had never dreamed for a moment of hoping. The whole thing was too plain. And now all they thought of was saving what was left to them.

What coldness and almost rawness in the house! As though there was a dusty lonely hearth in every room, and the fires were never to be lighted again. The terrible gauntness of life, that sets in after the death of any one that has been loved,

seemed to be present. Yet Violet, with a cheerfulness that absolutely made the hearts of others ache, went hither and thither with what seemed a newly-found zest for the practical duties of life. No one, however, could see how it would end, as yet.

As the Eastport season was now over, and the town itself almost emptied, this little catastrophe came in seasonably enough for the natives. Even in the matter of news it was believed that Providence tempered the wind; but this sending so precious a store did, indeed, seem almost a special deliverance. The good folks were grateful, and the "witnesses" to the scene—unhappily too few in proportion to the wants of the population—were held even in a competitive esteem. Even in communities of greater importance such a business rarely takes place. It was canvassed in many shapes, with eagerness, humour, anger; but in most instances with satisfaction.

Young Brett—as indeed might be expected—showed out in brightest and most faithful colours. More honest and serviceable devotion could not be conceived. He took it grievously to heart, yet with divided emotions; for he could not bring himself

to believe *much* ill of his friend, whom he clung to so loyally. He charitably held to there being foreign influences at work, and to Fermor's being in some sort the victim of destiny. Having arrived, through many painful stages of reasoning, at this conclusion, he was at liberty to indulge his sympathy. How his heart was wrung for that suffering family! How, with a deeply dejected face, he came there when he thought he could, and as often as he could, with decency! And when admitted he could have wished himself away, he found himself so dull and clumsy. He would have given worlds to have been allowed to show his deep, deep feelings in some bold, substantial shape; for what were words—which, after all, he did not possess, and could not buy. He thought faintly and remotely of the gun, so satisfactory in the instance of men. He had always found it the fullest and happiest exponent. Here he saw it was wholly out of place, but the idea in his mind was as of something *analogous* to the gun. This lay on his mind, and the honest child laboured much, and with real distress, at what he called seeing his way, and saw, at last, that he must bound his wishes by mere sympathy.

For Pauline he felt most, and was so earnest that she should employ him in some way, that she felt for him, and did give him some trifling commission. He would have been proud to have been used, as errand-boy even. His good terrier face, full of sympathy, brought a sort of comfort to the house.

Someway he seemed more suited to the present tone of affairs than John Hanbury, who came too, and tried hard to make himself useful and acceptable. Yet he felt—and it was felt in the house, felt very unjustly, too—that he was associated with the late business. His honest face, full of unbounded sympathy, kept alive what all were anxious to put away, like the vacant chair of a lost relative, or a picture. Such a place should always be filled up speedily, and the picture removed. He could not bring himself to see it in this way, and was, in fact, longing and praying for some opening in which he could prove himself devoted.

Those weeks were indeed an awful time. The weary look in Violet's face almost shocked him. About the twentieth evening of the twentieth day Hanbury found her alone in the drawing-room,

and with the best intentions in the world began to offer some earnest good advice, but which he handled clumsily.

It was to the strain of "going away," of "keeping up," of "having a duty to oneself, and the friends who loved her so," with the other platitudes, about as useful and practical as though one were to say in the case of a broken blood-vessel, "Do make an effort, and the bleeding will stop." He spoke with a trembling voice. "For God's sake, do, dearest Miss Violet. It is killing us all to see the way you look. For all our sakes, *do*, I implore you; and there are some of us who would die for you."

Violet listened a little vacantly at first, passed her hand over her face, tossed her head, and laughed a faint laugh. "Why do you talk of dying?" she said; "pray don't mention the word. We have wonderful dispositions. I will get mamma to go somewhere. I should like a pleasant watering-place, with plenty of people; something gay, for this is growing dull. So dull," added Violet, forcing the muscles of her lips into a smile, "that—that——"

Hanbury was looking at her, wondering and

terrified, when she broke out suddenly, covering up her face :

“ I can’t, I *can’t* any longer ; I can’t indeed. Go away, leave me—do—let every one leave me. O ! ” and she was tossing on the sofa, gasping and sobbing in a sort of frantic tempest of grief. Hanbury rushed to the bell, rushed to the door. They were all in the room in a moment, round the unhappy child. Hanbury fled to the open street, beating his forehead as he went. More of the old clumsiness ! He could go and drown himself.

Posting along, and not caring where he went, he suddenly saw Colonel Bolstock, Fermor’s colonel, riding by ; rather, he saw a horse of his own which the colonel had bought. The colonel pulled up : for a little talk about a horse, in the presence of a horse, was like having a cigar. An idea suddenly flashed upon Hanbury : not often had he such inspirations.

“ Doing well,” said the colonel, looking down the flanks of his horse ; “ turning out very fairly indeed.”

“ Tell me,” said Hanbury, hastily ; “ Fermor’s gone, I know, but what time did he say he would be back ? ”

"I gave him ten days' leave," said the colonel; "by the way, there's a horse of his——"

"There, that will do," said Hanbury, turning back; "I must go——" And he *was* gone, leaving the colonel looking sourly after him. Here was news indeed; stupid of them all not to have thought of that. After all, Fermor was true—called suddenly away. Above all, that *he* should be the bearer! This would redeem months of clumsiness.

He rushed up-stairs and plunged into the room again. Violet was still working in hysterical sobbing. The anxious faces were about her.

"I have got some news," said Hanbury, his great eyes twinkling with honest delight. They all started. "Yes, *some* news," he said, "at least. He's only gone for ten days."

Violet flew to her mother with a cry. "I knew it! I knew it! I *knew* it!" she almost shrieked. "O, mamma! mamma!" and she fell on her mother's shoulder, weeping and sobbing, and laughing again.

Pauline looked at Hanbury doubtfully, almost angrily. "What is this story?" she said, in a

half whisper; "you should not have done it. Tell me about it."

"No, no," said he, scarcely listening, but looking anxiously at Violet; "it is all certain—the colonel himself told me. And I tell you what," he added, with excitement, "this night I am going up to London, will find him out there, tell him of our poor darling child, and return with joyful news. Perhaps bring him back! There!"

Pauline shook her head sorrowfully.

He saw opposition, and said, piteously, "*Let me go. Do!* I must, indeed. It will be doing something."

It did strike Pauline that it would, after all, be doing something. Anything—and the bare expectancy of anything—was better than the fatal waste of hopeless despondency into which they were now plunged.

She said no more, and Hanbury went his way. Alas! if he had only waited to hear that mounted colonel finish his sentence leisurely, he would have been told of a letter which had arrived at the barracks the day before. He had *not* waited.

Hanbury came back when he was ready. Violet was in a nervous flutter, saying over and over

again, with a frantic delight, "I knew it! I knew it! What did I tell you all?"

"Don't reckon too much, darling, on these things. How it goes to my heart to damp your spirits—but don't."

"Nor do I reckon on too much, mamma. But now I have a conviction, a certain conviction. I knew it—I said it." (Poor child, she never *had* said it, indeed.) "Dear Mr. Hanbury, my own true friend, *you* know me, *you* understand me. I always believed it. Go, now. Don't lose a second. You will be too late, *indeed* you will. He will come back with you if he can; if not, make him write. Be sure you do."

Violet's face was earnest and wild, as she impressed these instructions on him.

"I must go up now," she said, the tired look spreading like a film upon her face, "for I have gone through a good deal lately, thinking over all this. And I have been very foolish; but you *must* own that his going away so suddenly on that night—it looked——"

Her eyes began to swim, and in a moment she was weeping silently and bitterly, but without her old agitation. And her mother had put her arms

round her, and said, straining her close, as if some one were about to take her away from her :

“ My own dear, darling, darling child ! ”

And thus Hanbury started after this fatal will-o'-the-wisp. He got to London, and there was told the truth.

Fermor at that moment was seeing the sun rise on the blue waters of the Mediterranean with fine effect. The packet was listlessly gliding over the sea. It was charming *dolce far niente*.

The little romance he had passed through came back on him with a gentle pain, not wholly unpleasant. “ Poor, poor Violet ! ” he said, “ I feel some reproaches of conscience. I do indeed. She was *so* gentle. Only for that set about her—they were turning her into a perfect little Machiavel. Ah ! Mrs. Rose, you out so early on deck ? Is not this a picture ! Is not this like molten cobalt, &c. ! ”

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH.

SICUT FLOS.

ON the day that Hanbury returned to Eastport by the mail train, there came with him, in the railway post-office, a letter in Lady Laura's writing—a letter which she had put off writing, partly from its being a disagreeable duty, and partly from her having other more important affairs to claim her attention. Her hearing of Hanbury's inquiries brought the matter again to her mind. "That girl" had been sending one of "her set" to look after Charles, perhaps to intimidate, so she went to her desk and wrote a good practical letter, a little kind in parts, a little cold in others, but, above all, lady-

like. "After all," said Lady Laura, "the girl has some reason to complain. Charles had no business to make a fool of her. With people of her class time is money. I must say," thought Lady Laura, beginning to ruminate, "we got him out of it very cleverly. If I had been one of the stupid, storming, crying mothers, he would have been tied to that girl by this time."

She enclosed a letter of "Charles's" directed to Violet, which had been lying in her desk for many days, and sent both to the post.

Hanbury could not bring himself to go near the place for hours after his arrival. A day had been fixed for his return, so he was expected. Violet was flitting about the house anxiously and restlessly, in a wearing agitation. She was, in fact, in a sort of low fever at the moment. Her pale face was seen at many windows looking out wistfully. A mysterious instinct of some terror or horror approaching filled all other hearts in the house.

The post came. With a little swoop Violet was down at the door. With her hot hand she got a letter addressed to herself, and knew Lady Laura's writing. She gasped as she tore it open. The others were on

the stairs hurrying after her—but too late. There was Fermor's letter inside, and, with a cry of joy, she flew up-stairs. "He has written! He has written!" she said. "I knew it! I knew it!"

What followed may be conceived—when the first lines of that letter, written ever so tenderly and gently, trembled before her eyes. She had instinct enough to guess it all. That was her last blow. How was it to be expected that so frail a creature should endure so much? The little resolution—the little "manfulness," if it may be called so, which she had kept up for the sake of others, had now given way. The waters rushed in.

On that night all was changed into a house of sickness. A wretched mother of a wretched daughter, aged and feeble herself, could not endure all these shocks. The low fever present in Violet's hot hands spread violently. The local doctor, the same who had been at their little feast, came in again and began his work. He did what he could, yet he was not of "the skilful." Yet one of greater skill, even than Mr. Cade, whose touch had so miraculously healed the bruised Fermor—(O sweet days! basking in a golden light, and removed centuries

away!)—even he could not avail much more. A quiet patient; giving “no trouble,” waiting for the moment eagerly.

Two miserable faces, worn and haggard, watched that slow travelling away: that soft face gradually spiritualised into a shadow. She was as quiet as a child, which indeed she was; so quiet, so calm, that they began to whisper doubtfully to themselves that she was growing better.

One Sunday morning the unskilful local doctor ran in to see her as he went to his church. The sun came in so brightly; the new flowers which thoughtful hands sent every day to fill the room, looked so fresh and gay; and there was such a reflected brightness on Violet's face, and she spoke so softly and calmly, though still with her old weariness, that he was quite confounded. “The turn *has* come,” he said below in the drawing-room. “My dear friends, there is *every* hope. I say so seriously. I do indeed. I am the last man in the world that would encourage vain expectations. I tell you, I am astonished at the change.”

Grateful eyes were bent on this angel of goodness: full and suffused hearts could not trust themselves to speak. “Take her out,” he said,

turning to Louis, and pointing to Pauline; "this fine sun will do her good. She is exhausted with all this watching, and it will give you both strength."

The faithful maid remained with Violet, who seemed, from her soft half-closed eyes, to be on the verge of sleep. On the last night she had slept a little. The brother and sister went out, too grateful to omit anything they were told to do. They wandered on along a certain green lane lined with trees—a walk the sisters were fond of—for half an hour. They heard the church bells at a distance, and from the green lane could see the congregation in a gay parti-coloured ribbon unwinding from the porch. They then turned to go home, for they were fearful of staying too long, and met John Hanbury on the way. The air was delicious. The three walked together slowly, and in a low voice they told him of the happy change.

When they were not a hundred yards from home, they saw some one running to them and beckoning violently. It was the faithful maid, with a scared and terrified face—the certain instinct of danger. They hurried down to the house

to meet her. As she passed them she did not stop, and they only caught the words, "for the doctor!"

They were in the room in a second. A frantic woman was on her knees at the bedside, hardly recognisable as Mrs. Manuel. There was a face lying there, whiter than they had ever seen face before, and a sort of light seemed to flutter over it from the eyes to the lips, from the lips to the eyes back again. Sweet, soft Violet—sweet, soft, persecuted Violet—was drifting slowly away out of the rude rough waters which had been too troubled for her gentle little soul.

As the three came round her, either the sound or the sudden appearance seemed to stay that gliding progress; faint colour floated back into the pale face, the eyelids were lifted slowly; and from those eyes, not yet glazing, stole out gentle recognition. Light hovered about her lips, which seemed to move, either attempting to speak or trying to meet her sister's. Now, happily, the old troubles, the old doubts, the old expectancy—troubles, anguish, all—were dropping fast behind. Pauline stooped over, and the lips of the two sisters were pressed together. Such little power as there was

left seemed to be spent in that kiss, and when Pauline raised herself, and looked down again with dim eyes, she saw a sweet and gracious tranquillity below, and a smiling repose, which told her that that little heart was no more to be fretted by man's cruelty.

All through the fatal and immemorial routine which succeeds a departure such as has been described—through the early blinding stupefaction, the dismal leading away, the horrible sense of solitude, and the tremendous and gaunt desertion which walks in and takes possession of the house like an ogre, with tears after a time beginning to flow in frantic bursts—when in this dismal succession that Sunday was nearly spent, and evening had drawn on, Pauline was seen sitting in the drawing-room, stiff, hard, stony, with strained eyes that had shed few tears, and had almost a fierce look. The faithful maid flitted up to her at times in alarm, and spoke to her softly and soothingly, but she did not hear.

Alarmed, the brother came down with red and swollen eyes, took her hand in his, and with a broken voice tried some of the hackneyed "common

forms" of comfort. The faithful servant came and joined him, adding her voice. She, indeed, felt it as sorely as any of them, and her consolation made its way through sobs. But Pauline did not hear them. Her eyes were on some object in the window, where there was no perceptible object.

He grew alarmed. "Come, Pauline dearest, try. Do speak to us! We all feel and are heart-broken, but we must help each other. We have to live for others now!"

A flash came into Pauline's face—a flash that made him draw back. She started to her feet. With a sharp, hard tone, they heard her speak now for the first time. She said:

"Yes. We have something else to live for, too. If I had not that to think of, I should die. *There is a murderer to bring to justice!*"

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH.

THE NEW PLAY.

A LITTLE white retiring monument in the Eastport churchyard, marked with a carved violet and a simple girl's name, was beginning to turn a little grey, after two years' exposure. Over at Eastport the soft rain was dropping gently on it; but in Paris, at the same moment, a hot Paris day was fading out, and French Capua, where Youth is always at the prow, and Pleasure sleepless at the helm, was getting ready for the night. Little standing armies were drawn up in rank and file at every theatre door; and in the court-yard of the Grand Sybarite Hotel, at the foot of the stone staircase, was waiting a carriage of the establishment, to take away guests to the opera or theatre.

The Sybarites had feasted some four hundred strong, and were dropping away down the steps two and three together, in a pleasant rout. The Frenchmen, very warm and mellow, like true voluptuaries, were lighting cigars and picking teeth, or abstractedly feeling their purloined sugar lumps in their pockets. The hotel was lit up. Lights flashed from the Hundred and One Bureaux. Indistinctly the stars were seen through the great glass roof over the court. There was a glimpse of Paradise at the bright café to the left, where were wandering in the sated diners to lounge on velvet. Bright clean waiter youths lolled on the great stairs and chattered; for work was done. Carriages plunging and clattering in under the porch, were pulled up with violence, and, flinging out a visitor, clashed to their doors, and were gone again. There was lull in the life of the huge hotel; for it had been rather spent with the grand operation just passed through, and there was a reaction. The Capuans were languid.

The carriage of the establishment had been waiting more than half an hour, when a shining boy of a waiter called from the top of the steps to the coachman to be on the alert, for his com-

pany were coming down. Presently there did come down a tall Englishman in evening uniform, with an auburn-haired girl in a white cloak upon his arm—wreath, fan, and snowy gloves. He was clean, fresh, and transparent of skin, as only Englishmen are. Two young gay waiters leaning on the balustrade smiled after them. A man in green and gold, bursting from some concealed hutch or warren, was holding the door open magnificently, then shut it to firmly as the couple entered, and the direction was given.

Boy-waiter the first looked at his neighbour inquiringly. Boy-waiter the second answered the look in speech.

“Capitaine Anglais.”

“La petite? Tenez—ça va! Numero 60.”

Deft handmaids had long since investigated minutely the crested ivory brushes in Numero 60, and studied Madame's dresses, and seen on a roomy portmanteau large white initials, “C. F.,” and read with lame pronunciation a little card, “Captain Fermor.”

Not alone the two English in the neat fiacre, but all Paris, was converging to the one theatre. They were lighting up Aladdin's Wonderful Lamps

all along the magic Boulevards. Crowds of the faithful sitting at tiny marble tables, sipping from the cloudy caraffes, saw through the trees the train of dark coaches trundling by with a flare to the one spot.

The English girl-wife, sitting in the carriage of the Sybarite establishment, burst out with all a child's raptures as she saw this gay panorama pass by. She broke out with little soft spasms of rapture. "How beautiful! How lovely! O, look! Do look!" while the English captain, calm as one who had seen all the known shows of the world, does look out—as a concession to this pleasant popular humour—and says that they do these things very well on the whole.

He was pleased that she was pleased: that is, he was calmly complacent. And, as they rolled along, he did the showman as if he were good-naturedly talking in his own grounds. There will not be so enraptured an audience at any of the theatres open to-night as his companion. It was her first night in Paris.

They got to their theatre. "Some fellow has a new play to-night," said Captain Fermor, carelessly, as he helped her out and looked round with

disgust at ~~some one~~ who jostled him. "They *do* make such a fuss about these things in this country."

The "fellow" who had written the play was a very famous young author, who, in his round of daily life, had played many characters, and shown many profiles. He was brilliant, witty, sentimental, a petted darling of the salons, free and easy in manner, freer and easier in his life, penniless and political. In short, a true young French author. All these profiles, however, he might have shown save the last; which was the wrong one—and which he had exhibited to wrong persons. So that when the light-haired English captain and his wife—in custody of a dreadfully business-like woman in green, armed with little footstools—was let into a box or balcony, they found it crowded to the ceiling, but with two armies mixed together below, who at the proper season would draw off and join battle.

Captain Fermor settled himself, drew his hand up and down freely over his fresh clean shirt linen (perhaps the freshest and cleanest of all shirt linen in that assembly), fetched out his glass, and did the honours of the place. The girl beside him

had a round quiet soft face, that would be called handsome, with a *good* smile. With fresh round cheeks, that twenty years hence would be fresher and rounder, she had a smile and a laugh ever hovering—hiding, perhaps—at the corner of her mouth: which, on faint encouragement, fluttered out and crossed to the other side, like some of the little figures in the Strasburg clock. She was very happy at that moment, in the gay and almost exciting scene, in herself, and in the noble—almost too superior—protector and patron who sat beside her reading his bill, who was so good natured as to teach her, in reference to many of the little matters about her.

He took her through that document. “These fellows,” he said, with comic pity, “will make a play out of anything. Just listen: ‘L’AMOUR SE PAIE.’ This is what we have come to see, L’Amour se Paie. There they are, all like children down there, crushing each other flat to get a doll or a bit of sugar-stick. I should like to throw it down to them—how they would struggle for it!”

The girl laughed at this pleasant way of putting the thing, and looked down at the amphitheatre of big children below. It was the most crowded play-

ground they had seen for some time ; but the game would presently turn out of a rough sort. A low hum and buzz rose from it, and nearly every one was standing up with the usual optical fire-arm levelled from his eye.

Next door, as it were, were a pair of typical Frenchmen, well dined and well filled. They had about begun to live ; that meal was almost the first tangible act of this day. One was black and glossy haired, with cheeks shaded over, through imperfect shaving, like parchment written upon ; the other a gross swollen Frenchman, who under his waistcoat might have been corded round and round like brawn, and whose hair, black, short, and stubbly, dipped down in the centre of his forehead like the peak of a lady's waist. Both did a great deal of navvy's work, with little pickaxes, about their teeth, and both contemplated the English girl with quiet and critical study, as if she were part of the entertainment for which they had paid.

"English?" said the corded gentleman, half across his pickaxe. (He had come on a rocky and obstinate stratum.)

"Yes," said the other, also excavating ; "a

dish fresh and soft, too!" Both critics, calmly approbative, did not even care to drop their voices.

"Dear Charles," said the girl, delighted with everything about, "how charming all this is! It is fairy land! O, what a place to live in! Ah," said she, suddenly, "do you recollect Roger le Garçon, that you used to lend me? Dear me," she added, in a sort of rapture of recollection, "how pleasant that was! Only this morning I was reading the old, old copy. But you forget."

"Ah, yes!" said he. "To be sure. You know I don't like plays. Why don't they begin in the orchestra?" Someway, he did not dwell on the reminiscence with the same relish as she did.

"How long ago all that seems," said the girl; "like a dream. Your going to India—and coming back again. And that soft, sweet child Violet; who had such a charming name, and was so cold and treacherous——"

"A year and six months," said he, in a dry key, "is a year and six months, I believe. There were things at that place, and persons at that place, one meets every day. We have done with it now, and had better let it rest, and think of the present."

"But, somehow," she went on, "I felt such an interest in her ; though I never saw her, I felt to her like a sister. And I assure you," she continued, in a little confusion, "only that papa had set his heart on your marrying me—I had often begged of him to go away and leave the place ; it seemed so cruel to interfere with such a soft darling as I fancied her."

Fermor coloured. "You are candid," he said, a little bitterly. It was only the first two months of their marriage, or the infusion would have been stronger. "You tell the truth, certainly. I suppose there are to be no secrets between husband and wife."

She smiled, taking this for a welcome little burst of nuptial jealousy. (Olives come in very pleasantly with wine.)

"I like to talk of Eastport," she said, coquetishly, "for I was very happy there, though so ill. And yet it was *so* odd, so incomprehensible."

"What, pray?" said he, suddenly.

"I mean *her* turning out such a cold, designing creature—marrying that other man. I could not have fancied it. I was *so* sorry, though it was so fortunate for me."

A smile of complacency struggled in Fermor's face, while he said, "And for me too, I suppose I must say."

"And O! will you forgive me for telling you?" she went on, eagerly. "When I first heard of it, I thought the poor girl had been what they call thrown over, and I felt so much for her, that I said to papa——"

Fermor turned sharply round. "We have come to hear this play," he said, "and to amuse ourselves, have we not? By-and-by, we shall have time enough for these reminiscences; so please, now——" And he forced the rest of the sentence into a hard smile and a harder nod.

She was sufficiently trained to see how thin the ice was about this part. And she moved away cautiously from the subject.

The three strokes of a mallet on the stage made every flower rustle its leaves as if a breeze had fluttered round, and the curtain went up.

L'Amour se Paie was after the true pattern—of which regular "forms" seem kept in stock in France. It was very long and all conversational, and shifted from Madame Hauteville's drawing-

room to her garden and back again. When it came to be printed by M. Dentu of the Palais Royal, the reader found his page planted scantily with a few lines of type, and each line boasted a few meagre shrubs of words. Still it was a marvel of neat wit—wit that is fined and delicately grained with emery-powder, and real ladies and gentlemen seemed to walk from Madame Hauteville's drawing-room to her garden and back again.

The way in which the truth, or aphorism, or even hypothesis of *L'Amour se Paie* was set before the audience, lay in working together a financier of tempered fun, a marquise, a Paris man of fashion, a simple artless school-girl, and a "noble" tutor, suffering from his situation. All during the first act these threads were plaited languidly: a warp of conversation was woven in volubly. The exquisite showed his exquisiteness, the simple girl her simplicity, the financier his finance, and the "noble" tutor his nobleness—yet nothing had been done. As the act-drop came down there was applause from the grown children crowded below, applause met strangely by scornful laughs and a few hisses. But as yet there was nothing to

applaud, nothing to condemn; the storming party were artfully waiting their time, until, say the end of the third act; when, waving their red flag, they would fly at the redoubt and sack the doomed piece.

Captain Fermor, looking down from his loge, which was high enough, and from a yet higher balcon of lofty English disdain, said, with a curling lip, "And they call this thing a play, do they? What is it all about? Why, it isn't a patch upon the Haymarket."

The fresh soft girl knew French—that is, the French of men and women—thoroughly. Fermor had some old building materials of that tongue, bought at school, lying about in his head.

"O, but, Charles," she said, "that poor young man, so chivalrous——"

"Do you mean that whining tutor?" he said, contemptuously. "The whole thing is a bore. It must fail. I wish," he added, putting up his hand politely to stop a yawn, "I wish we had gone to that other, what d'ye call it—spectacle."

The two Frenchmen still looked at the English lady steadily. The corded one—mellowed with

good Medoc and coffee, and a little cognac on the surface of the coffee, which, coming so near the top, gave his cheeks and eyes a warm inflamed tone—approved. He nodded approval to his neighbour. He was thinking how it would be compatible with his other little engagements—he would make up his mind before the play was over.

CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH.

A MEETING.

SECOND act. The mournful tutor was leaning his forehead on his hand and trying to read. For six francs a day he had to come and give a lesson to the simple girl whom he loved. She *has* loved her tutor, because, as she told her friend, Mademoiselle Laroux, "he was the first man I had ever seen, just as I was *éprise* of my first doll." In truth, she had a leaning to the exquisite, who was so pleasant with his Paris talk. Financier again, tutor, marquise, school-girl, all in a check pattern of talk; but no serious work.

At that moment there was a rustle and noise of moving chairs close beside the English lady and

gentleman, with the sound of a box-door closing like the click of a trigger. Three seats had been vacant the whole night, guarded jealously. These were now at last to be filled. Then there came boldly down to the front, where she stayed a moment drawn up to her full height for the house to admire, a tall figure, lustrous and brilliant, flashing under the lights with every motion. A few beings of the parterre, not engaged in tumult, instantly turned their backs to the stage and levelled their glasses with effrontery. With her also came a dark square-built young man, with vellum cheeks and thoughtful meditative eyes, and a second gentleman. But they were in cold colours—dull sketches in greys and neutral tints, beside *her*. They sat down together. She continued to draw all eyes.

It was that bright radiant look which seemed to reflect back the radiance of fascination. Her rich black hair flashed back the light from a hundred ripples. It hung over her white forehead, and was gathered away to the right and left like the heavy folds of a curtain. Her face was oval, her eyebrows marked and arched, her eyes liquid and dark, and though brilliant, were not sharp nor piercing, and, above all, her face seemed to be lit up from

within by a strange piquant expression. But among the folds and draperies of her hair (and this the opera-glass musketeers in the parterre noted specially) was a rich scarlet geranium placed with excellent effect, and, carelessly dropping from her shoulders, was an Eastern black and gold opera-cloak. She might be a Jewess or—a Spaniard.

The English girl was absorbed in the tutor and his woes. She had never seen anything so delightful. Fermor, with a curl of depreciation on his lip, seen under the black opera-glass, was slowly travelling round the house.

“I never saw such an exhibition,” said he, not taking the glass from his eyes; “but we must stay, for I suspect there will be——”

He stopped suddenly, for the two muzzles of his glass were resting on the new faces just come in. The glass dropped on his knees. Then he gave a half start; half rose, and sank again into his chair.

His eyes were fixed on the apparition of the bright lady and her two companions. A few “amateurs” in the parterre were looking too; but the whole house was absorbed in the play. The girl beside Fermor, with tearful earnest eyes, and

the round chin resting on her hand, was wrapped up in the young tutor. She had never heard anything so interesting. There was such agony, such suffering in his face—that——

Suddenly she heard her husband whisper bluntly:

“We must go away now. Come!”

She came back to practical life.

“Go away!” she said, in blank astonishment.

“Why? O no, no! Just at this point, too!”

“I am sick of it,” said he, rising. “I have a headache. I suppose you will not ask me to stay if I am ill?”

She rose in a second, and gathered up her cloak and “matériel.” She looked back wistfully at the noble young tutor, whose face showed actual writhings of moral suffering; his sense of the degradation of his position was so very acute. As she turned to go, her cloak caught in a chair and overturned it. A flash of faces was turned to them, and a subdued “ts—s—” was heard.

“There! they will all see us!” said Fermor, with something like ferocity, “and I wanted to get out without noise!”

He caught her arm roughly, and hurried her away.

She was frightened. "What is the matter, dear Charles?" she said again.

"Nothing," he said, shortly. "I did not say there was. Now please don't tease me, and let us get home in quiet."

He hurried her along the great passages. They got to the top of the flight of stairs.

"Take my arm!" he said.

But there, at the same point, they were met by another party going away. It was the brilliant lady and her companions, who could not have heard a sentence of the new play, and were literally going away almost as soon as they had come.

Though in a little trouble, the girl was struck by the brightness of the Spanish-looking face and the flashing of her beauty, which she had now seen for the first time.

"O look, look, Charles!" she whispered, hurriedly; when, to her amazement, the lady came to meet them.

"Captain Fermor," said the stranger, and in her voice there was a sustained chanting sound almost melancholy, "what a meeting! How strange, how curious! And at a theatre, of all places in the world!"

Fermor was not yet composed enough to answer steadily. He forced a kind of smile.

"Not forgotten me, surely?" said the lady. "You remember when we last met, or when we *were* to have met?"

"Yes," said Fermor, faintly.

"And this," said she, "is Mrs. Fermor? I was sure of it, at a distance. I was one of your husband's old acquaintances. One of that crowd which he had to brush through, when life for him was literally a ball-room. One of the crowd whom he has paid visits to, and taken down to supper, and whose name he has forgotten by next morning."

Fermor was now collected enough to speak as Fermor was accustomed to speak.

"We are going home," he said; "a stupid play, that has given me a headache."

"How long do you remain in this place?" said the Spanish lady, abruptly, addressing Mrs. Fermor.

The latter, who had been looking at the strange lady quite fascinated, answered hastily, "O—we are to stay a month, I believe."

Fermor struck in hurriedly, "No, no. We

leave to-morrow; we are obliged to return. Got a letter to-day."

"Stay a month? Leave to-morrow?" said the Spanish lady, with a smile. "Then your plans are scarcely decided. You recollect my brother?" she added. "This is Mr. Romaine, his friend."

"I am afraid," said Fermor, "we must go away now. We have to——"

"Where are you staying?"

"At the Grand Hotel," said the English girl, who was addressed.

"O, then we shall see you there. Ours is Number 110. We have hardly chosen our rooms yet. But we shall see each other very often, and renew an old acquaintance. Indeed, we shall come and see you to-morrow," said the Spanish-looking lady, gaily. "Louis and I. You will be at home at twelve?"

"Yes, yes," said Fermor, hastily. "Delighted. To-morrow, at twelve."

"Good night, then," said the Spanish-looking lady. "I am so glad to have met you again. This is life, you see, all over, parting in a ball-room—meeting at a theatre. Now, Mr. Romaine, be bitter on that text."

Mr. Romaine—whose face had a handsome gauntness, and whose black eyes, and whose black moustache hanging like curls over his mouth, had an odd attraction for Mrs. Fermor—said something in a low voice to his friend.

“Ah, exactly,” said the Spanish lady. “To-morrow, then, at twelve. Good night.”

In the dark carriage, where Fermor’s face could not be seen, the girl began to chatter and wonder.

“And you have forgotten her name?” she said, suddenly. “How wonderful! I should have remembered that splendid face till my dying day. I shall long to see her again.”

“Yes,” said he, catching at what she had suggested; “is it not odd? I shall recollect it later, I suppose.”

“It is so strange,” she said; “if I had seen a man with such a face, I should never have forgotten his name.”

Captain Fermor was moody and gloomy, and said impatiently, “I dare say—no doubt. Please don’t ask me why this, and why that, and wonder at me for this and that. I have a headache, and the racket of this place is enough to give one a hundred headaches.”

She was full of concern in a moment.

"How thoughtless and stupid I am," she said.
"Why did you not tell me?"

At their hotel the green and gold official came rushing, and opened the door, as if it were a matter of life and death they should be extricated at once. The great stairs flashed out white and spacious. The sleepless Bureaux, where the lights blazed, were busy with their entries and erasures of arrivals and departures day and night long: of what were, in fact, the Births and Deaths to the Grand Hotel and its monster family.

At the top of the stairs Fermor stopped short suddenly. "What a place!" he said. "I am sick of their noise and flurry. One can't get a minute's quiet here. Look there! What did I say?"—as another carriage clattered in. "Shall we leave early in the morning, and go to the Mira-beau, or some Christian place?"

Deeply concerned for the pain which he must be suffering, she answered, eagerly, "Yes, Charles. Or what would you say—could we not go now?"

It was not nine o'clock.

"A very good idea," he said, with real pleasure.
"You could put a few things together, and send

for the boxes in the morning. You are a clever child, and a ready child too."

Greatly elated by this unusual commendation, she tripped away.

He went down to the Bureaux, where they were so busy with the Births and Deaths. This was to be a Death, for he was going to ask for his bill. As he came out suddenly, a lady and gentleman, who had descended from the carriage, stopped him.

"What! Home again?" she said, "and we just as soon as you."

Fermor began to bite his moustache.

In a moment a waiter came to him with a strip of paper, and asked would monsieur have a carriage?

"Going away?" said the Spanish lady. "Only think, Louis! At this hour, too. Surely not. Recollect, you were to have seen us to-morrow."

Fermor crushed up the paper. "We have had to alter our arrangements," he said. "We are obliged to go. We have very little time. So——"

"No, no," said the Spanish lady, smiling, and shaking her head. "This is a little fourberie—some

of the old, old phantoms. Don't you recollect when we lived at Eastport, and when we were all so happy together? I dare say you have told her all about the time. No? Absurd. You can't go to-night. Where is Mrs. Fermor? I shall easily persuade *her*. Send up for her."

Fermor looked at the lady doubtfully and irresolutely, still crumpling the paper.

"No, no," she said, with encouragement. "Tomorrow morning is more rational. More like a calm, sensible Englishman. Above all, when we meet an old friend, whom we have not seen for so long, and whom a mere chance has helped us to meet. Do oblige me in this. Let us sit down here awhile in Paradise, in the Arabian Nights! There are a hundred things I want to ask you—a hundred things *you* will want to hear from me. It will be old times returned over again."

There was something almost fascinating in her face and voice. Fermor, bewildered, confused, above all, surprised at the strange change in her—at the lightness and airiness of her manner (for she seemed a new Pauline)—made no resistance, but passed out with her into the bright colonnade

where the thousand-and-one tables are clustered, and the clink of glass and china furnishes music.

Five minutes later came tripping down the young Mrs. Fermor. She was ready, and her little packing all done. But her husband was gone. A little confused from the sense of this desertion, she went in to the Bureau.

Numero 60. Yes. Monsieur had been furnished with the note. A little fit of curiosity came over her at that moment, and she thought she would refresh her husband's memory about the lady at the theatre—pleasantly surprising him with superior information. Who were in Numero 110?

A few pages turned over with complaisance, and the young lady registrar answered:

“Numero 110 et 111, Monsieur et Mdle. Manuel.”

The young girl started. At the same moment an obliging young boy-waiter came to tell her that “Mr. the Captain” was outside the café, sitting with a lady.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH.

THE COLONNADE OF THE GRAND HOTEL.

UNDER that colonnade, and in the cool air, with carriage-lights twinkling past, and seen through the leaves of the trees, as though in a garden—with airy waiters flitting by with snowy napkins for wings, the English lady and gentleman sat at coffee. It was the best scenery in the world for confidence.

Every moment he was more and more amazed at the change in her.

She was a new Pauline, older, yet “finer,” more dazzling, more splendid, more womanly; more decided, too, in manner—firmer, and more distinct in her voice. She was leaning over the little

marble table, looking at him earnestly as she talked.

"Two years is a long time," she said, sadly; "I seem to have lived a quarter of a century. A thousand events have been crowded into that time. Spain, France, England—Spain again. We have been always travelling. It," she added, in a low voice, "it was the only thing. Rest seemed like death."

Fermor dropped his eyes. "And Spain," he said, absently; "why Spain again?"

"Ah," she said, "our poor mother, you know. It was *her* country, and it was natural that she should like to see it before she died. Old people somehow think of these things. We had money, thank God. Her cousin left her everything. But she did not enjoy it long. Poor mamma."

"Good God!" said Fermor, in some distress. "Is she——? I did not hear—I did not, indeed. I have heard nothing. I was so far away, or I should have written."

Pauline laughed, a laugh faintly harsh, which was one of the changes he had noted in her.

"Written!" she said. "Why? There was no reason in the world for *that*. We wanted no con-

solation from any one. You saw very little of her. I can fancy, too, in India, with precious time taken up—every moment of it. I have often heard what strain is put there on men of capacity.”

Fermor looked at her a little uneasily ; but the large eyes seemed to be fixed on him with perfect honesty.

“ Yes,” he said, “ they *did* work us there. But I am so sorry to hear this. And when ? ”

“ O, long ago ! A few months after you—had left. She was half a Spaniard, and very sensitive and delicate ; and our poor Violet’s death took hold of her mind a good deal, and, at last, unsettled it a little. You might have remarked how she doted on *her*—more, I believe, a great deal, than on me.”

There was a silence for some moments. Then Fermor said, in a low voice :

“ And Violet—poor Violet—I am glad you have mentioned it—I have often, I assure you, thought of it, and of that night, and what my conduct must have appeared. And I was so grieved when I heard it. But you know,” he added, eagerly ; “ *what* could I do ? I don’t like

speaking of it, it is so distressing a business, and has ended so unfortunately; but——”

“Why not?” said Pauline, hurriedly. “There is no need to take *that* view of it. After all, it is different with me, you know. Sisters will be sisters, and I,” she added, more quickly, “had an affection for her that was almost extravagant. But *that* is my concern, you see. I must keep my own sufferings for myself. She was a child, too soft and tender for life. Had she been a girl,” added Pauline, earnestly, “she would have lived.”

Again she laughed, and Fermor saw a film gathering over her eyes. She brushed it away hastily. “Is it not absurd?” she said. “And two years ago!”

Fermor was all softened. The picture of poor Violet came back on him with a pang of self-reproach.

“I know,” he said again, eagerly, “what you, what she must have thought. The business, I confess, *had* an odious look. But, if you had been behind the scenes, and seen what pressure——”

“Of course,” said she. “A mere ordinary affair. I suppose five thousand things of the

same sort go on every year in England. Poor foolish girls take fancies, and men, not so foolish, are naturally flattered; and so it goes on for a time. Then it is discovered that the whole is impracticable and will never do. Intellect must have something more to lean on than mere love and worship. And so the whole vanishes in a pretty cloud of romance."

"Exactly," said Fermor, eagerly.

"Your friends," said she, with eyes fixed on him, "naturally wished to see you advance in the world. You had brilliant prospects, abilities, good interest, and it was a pity to sacrifice them."

"Exactly," said Fermor again. "You quite understand it. It was a youthful attachment, but you know it would have ruined me. It was better for *both* in the end."

"Exactly," she said; "better for both. You say it was the only sensible course, after all. Of course you are right. Only a man of firmness and resolution could see it in *that* light. One of your weak youths would have plunged headforemost with her into ruin, and let the future take care of itself."

"I considered," said Fermor, growing quite

assured, "that I was bound to look to *her* as well as to myself. Far more, indeed. I know human nature pretty well. I have, in fact, made it a practical study. I knew there would be some suffering at first; but that would be far better than ten times that suffering later."

Pauline's face was growing intensely earnest as she listened. When he looked up, the expression changed suddenly.

"I *knew*," said Fermor, "you would make all allowance. I was sure of it. The fact was, *I* saw it was—I may tell you now—I saw it was a mistake, about as soon as it was done. I knew it, and was quite grieved."

Her eyes were fixed on him with a greater and greater earnestness. But he did not see how her lips were compressed. "Yes?" she said, with an interrogative anxiety.

"We can't be always wise. As you say, the next best thing after a mistake is to see that it is a mistake. *I* saw it the very next day."

"You *did*?" she asked, with a sudden energy that would have startled another; then added, hastily: "To be sure. Sensible always. We are only women, after all."

“Poor child!” he went on. “Another would have been blunt, and spoken at once. I thought it better to trust to time and chance, those two great contrivers.”

Again her eyes were fixed on him with a strange and almost deadly expression. “You *did*?” she said. “That was the plan, was it? I see. And it succeeded.”

He looked up in a little surprise.

“Poor, poor Violet!” she suddenly broke out. “Poor, sweet, wretched darling! To be handed over to chance and time, those two great contrivers! What a life! Why could we not have saved her, poor lost darling? Time and chance!” and she gave one of the strange laughs. “That was the secret, was it? But we should have had a stronger and less delicate subject to practise on. O, Violet! Violet!”

Her face dropped upon the little marble table, and Fermor heard her hysterical sobs as she stayed in that position for many minutes. He was greatly shocked, almost shocked at the violence of this and tried to soothe her. In a few moments he reached her face and wiped her eyes. “This is

very foolish," she said. "We women should train ourselves. But it does me good to think and talk of all this; it brings relief. It has quite comforted me, meeting you. We must have many a talk on this matter in London and here. But you go to-morrow. Of course you have your duties, and cannot waste time on a poor lonely sister like me."

She looked at him with a sort of shy fascination, and her voice was very musical and melancholy. "Twelve o'clock!" she said, rising suddenly; "how time has flown!"

"Good gracious!" he said, for the first time thinking of Mrs. Fermor. "So late! Yes, I shall see you again. We are not bound to a day. But I am so glad you have taken a calm, sensible view of this affair, as, indeed, I anticipated you would."

"Ah, yes! Let us go in now," she said. They went into the great court. It was almost deserted. But the sleepless Bureaux were still at work. At the bottom of the great stair she said "Good night."

She followed him with her eyes as he ascended

slowly: when he reached the top, he looked down and saw her figure in a wonderful attitude of grace. He thought again of the curious changes that had taken place in her. "What a crisis," he said, as he looked down, "to pass through! How would a less skilful man have done?"

At that distance he could not see her face, nor the features in her face. But the eyes were flashing. And he could not hear the hard voice that came from the lips:

"It was, then, his own work; and he is satisfied! Before God, then, I shall not spare him!"

Once more, at the door of the lobby, he looked down, and saw her hand raised towards him. Complacently, he thought it was a sort of salutation, and he waved his own to her. Then went his way along the galleries. There was a smile on his face as he passed along; it was softened to a gentle feeling of romance very pleasurable. "My life," he thought, "has been a strange one. It might be written in a book. And who can tell what is coming on, either?"

He found the young wife up, waiting. She had

been writing—writing home to her father. He required one letter every day, without fail.

“I was having some coffee out on the Boulevards,” said Fermor. “So sorry to have kept you ; met a friend.”

There was a curious look on the young wife’s face, a colder one than he had ever seen.

“Tell me about it,” she said, calmly. “An old friend, or a new one? Had he anything to tell?”

Fermor walked to the window impatiently. “Nothing that you would care to hear,” he said. “By the way, we need not be hurrying away in the morning. There is no necessity for such a precipitate departure. It would look absurd. We should be having the police after us!” He said this as though *she* had been proposing it.

“Just as you please,” she said.

Her passiveness mystified him. But no more was said on the matter.

On the next day, about two o’clock, Captain Fermor fixed a flower in his button-hole, chose out a new pair of gloves, put some perfume on his handkerchief, and sent up to Numero 110, to know if Mademoiselle Manuel was at home. “I

have not talked to a clever woman I don't know when," he said ; "I must tell her the whole story about poor Violet from the very beginning." He had, in fact, prepared a dramatic little narrative, in which he himself was painted as an object of great interest.

The boy-waiter came with word that Mr. and Miss Manuel had left for London by the early train that morning.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH.

THE HOUSE IN ALFRED-PLACE.

IN time, over the interval of two months. In space, from Paris to London. From the Grand Hotel to a bright cozy compact house—one of a clean series in Alfred-place, standing together like a row of Sunday-school children. Neighbours hardly knew who lived there, but the number was down in the note-books, and in the minds of many skilful men; was familiar at the Great Literary Club, and the name of Pauline Manuel lifted many faces from the *Times* or *Globe*. Among these was the face of, say, a herculean humorist who growled pleasantly at a hollow world—over claret; the faces of leading witty men who

brought their jokes and quips to dinners, like conjurors bringing their apparatus to a child's party, and who, like the conjurors, would not be received without their apparatus; of leading clergymen, hard thoughtful men, who dug and trenched in the heavy soil of reviews; of younger and more unclerical men, who did the ornamental gardening of magazines; of a placid Italian barytone, gentleman in everything save birth; of a bishop or two; of a doctor or two; of a lawyer or two; of a member of Parliament or two. These, with the faces of their wives, were Pauline Manuel's constituency—a miniature world in itself. In that small house in Alfred-place was a small round table that held exactly eight; it was lighted by white Dresden candelabra, and the light fell usually on a witty face, a clerical-reviewing face, a singing, a barristerial, a senatorial, or an editorial face. They were delightful little meals—complete—choice in all points.

How she drifted into such circles, or rather how they came floating and drifting about her, was through the mere general attraction which a bright, flashing, dazzling face, a face that people looked long after in the street, always exercises.

Lord Puttenham, who had but one standard of beauty, which was a musical standard, said she was like Grisi in her best days. To the house in Alfred-place came fossil old noblemen, like Lord Gilliflower, about as infirm as old furniture; tall, florid, general officers, as fond of the warm rays of beauty as of sitting in the sun; lively wives of lively men; in short, a delightful miscellany. At Alfred-place were the most delightful of morning calls, where new music was heard, and new painting worked at; of afternoon visits, where tea was drunk, and talk mixed with the tea, like cream, and where the little dinner was spread; from Alfred-place went the pleasant party to opera or play, and to Alfred-place came home the pleasant party from opera or play to the little supper on the round table. All liked her. Older acquaintances were eager to know her better; others outside were struggling and canvassing to be admitted. It was noted how eager she was to extend her list. She wished to know everybody.

“You only care for new faces,” said Fobley of the Guards; “half a dozen in the day—like new gloves.”

Pauline, who had for many minutes been eagerly

searching a gay crowd, flashed him a gay smile. "I do," she said; "I like variety. The man from Covent-garden changes these flowers for me every second day. Mr. Griesbach," she said to that reviewer of Gibbon, Pitt, the War of the Succession, and of other heavy men and subjects, "being at a window and seeing a procession go by all day long, that is the true notion of life! Don't you think so?"

When a new soldier came home from the Caroo Islands, or a new sailor from the Main, she always said to some of her staff, "Bring him to me." Travellers of any degree she relished, making them sit down beside her. The young soldier would think fatuously of his own charms, the seaman would glow with his pinkest blushes.

"O," she would say, "I have known so many who have gone out *there*. It must be delightful. I envy you all."

"We were up at Yalalabad, you know," the fatuous youth would say. "I and Filmer and old Jekyl. We used to dine with the Commissioner, an old Scotchman, with a daughter, and——"

"Did you ever meet with Sir Hopkins Pocock out there?"

“Who? Never heard of him—who’s he?”

“O, nothing,” said she. “An old friend—I thought you might.”

From that instant the youth—and he was but a type of many more who suffered under the same process—found the soft warm water growing suddenly colder, until he had to leap out and fly in confusion. So with an agreeable traveller, newly returned and writing a book—“Six Months with the Queen of Bushra”—Bushra was not far, that is to say, less than six hundred miles, from Sir Hopkins’s government. O yes, he had made an excursion as he came home—governor civil enough—wanted him (the traveller) to dine with him, but didn’t. Saw nothing—saw nobody—heard nothing, and heard of nobody. Nothing to the Queen of Bushra, who gave him a bracelet of teeth, which she had gathered with her own hands. The water grew icy cold with startling suddenness.

So with the tourist, the author of the lively journal “From Spa to Spa.” “You meet all sorts of people at those wicked places, Mr. Duncan Davis,” she would say, with a smile, “and touch them off so cleverly. I sat up till one last night reading the book you sent me. I have friends

that go every year, and can tell me nothing. By the way, did you ever fall in with a Mr. Carter and his family?"

"Carter, Carter!" said Mr. Duncan Davis, searching the old closet he called his memory. "Yes, to be sure, at Nauheim. There was a Carter there."

Pauline's face grew very eager. "You did?" she said. "Tell me about him—you quite interest me."

"To be sure," said Duncan Davis. "I knew him intimately. He was the chaplain, and had the English chapel, and daughters, and——"

But some one had turned the cruel cock, and the water again grew icy cold. Duncan Davis never told more of the Nauheim chaplain.

This had been Pauline's life, and Pauline's curious purpose of general inquiry had been noted by a few gentlemen as a phase of fascinating oddity. The wives of the gentlemen—strongly intellectual in their way, and whose voices rang out at dinner sharp and clear as their lords'—were pleasant on this fancy, and hinted at the supposed matrimonial end of all society.

"With so large a net, my dear," said Mrs. Win-

slow Jones, "she will have a salmon one of these mornings." This drawing in of her net was delightful to all assistants, for the fishwoman's voice was so gay and so fascinating. Her talk was a sort of moderated burlesque—a softened comic exaggeration—a dressing up of light flying topics in quaint, sober, solemn language. Then her deep limpid eye flashed, the bells began to ring, and the music to play, and the voices of gay laughing revellers were heard in her throat, as though a door had been opened quickly. But when the lights were down, and the social theatre closed for the night, the deep limpid eyes grew dull, the clouds began to gather, and an old look of weary restlessness, which seemed the reflection, as in a glass, of a heavier and a yet wearier restlessness, now more than two years old, came and settled on her face. These two looks were familiar and habitual with Pauline, during this year or two. The first the world saw: the second, only that gloomy brother, now grown yet more gloomy.

In a mean street—that hung like a torn bit of ribbon from the skirt of Belgrave-square—and in a rather mean house (but which was let, as birds'-nests are sold in China, for its weight in

silver), Lady Laura Fermor and her band had thrown up fresh works. Flushed with recent success, she had seen the truth that all things naturally tend to the centre and to the metropolis; and she was now operating from a sort of "pah" in town.

At pleasant chambers in St. James's-square, the special morning paper whose function it is to calculate the right ascension of the fashionable heavenly bodies, had announced that Sir Hopkins Pocock had recently arrived. The Eastern dependency had not been so skilfully manipulated as the Waipiti. With those intractable savages he had won glory; more civilised beings he had found less impressionable. He was recalled. His staff and dependents fell with him: and Sir Hopkins Pocock, C.B., returned to England, his health having broken down sadly, as we all well knew.

In Clarges-street, idlers, and neighbours who were idlers, had noticed men, like shipwrights on a ship's side, busy burnishing and scouring a model house from top to bottom; and at whose door a little later, great wains were seen disgorg-

ing furniture from their dark jaws, like whales on wheels. The more curious still, four days later, that there was a tall, grim, stiff gentleman, whose name was Carlay, in possession, and who was expecting home his married daughter and her husband, who were to live with him.

These are the little strands which are to make up the cord. The weaving may now begin.

CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH.

A VISIT.

DURING these days there was often sitting in Pauline's drawing-room, and almost at Pauline's feet, the chair was so very low, the gauntly handsome Mr. Romaine who was of her party at the French play. He was one of the travellers whom she had sent for, and who had been contemptuously turned away with the rest, when it was found that there was no profit in him; but he had declined to accept that furlough. It suited him to stay. His cheeks were well scorched, even to a hard red; his cheek-bones were high and glossy; there was much of his neck seen; he had shiny eyes in deep ambuscade, and a glossy

overhanging moustache. Yet he was tall, manly, gaunt, *alive*, and, when he chose, soft as a woman. He was one of those men who put up a dozen guns for luggage, and go and range among the poor wild beasts, who no doubt wonder what manner of wild beasts these are that come to their forests to scatter fire and smoke, and the sharp report, and the smashing stroke, and the cruel agony. He had gone among odd tribes—blacks, and greys, and red-coloured—and received the freedom of their wigwams, and had been offered wives in profusion, and had written very agreeable narratives of his adventure of Ulalumai, or the Tawny River. The Great Circulator took five hundred copies.

He was not married, and never would marry; but liked to scoff and gird at women with politeness; sitting at their feet (on low chairs) telling, too, of his rough sports—a sort of Othello in outline. To hear these matters *they* did seriously incline. There had been a lady whom he called Virginia Grammont, whom he loved to entertain in this fashion, on whose low chair he sat, whom he taught, scolded, carped at, complimented, sneered at, but regarded in some sort as his own

special property. At the hour of four every second day, he took her as regularly as he would his cigar, or dinner. She was a sort of book—more a pamphlet he would have said—for him. He *required* her.

She, of course, was of the gay young condottieri who scour the ball-rooms. Here making war for “an idea” does not obtain, and *could* not obtain. For, speaking metaphorically, how are horses and forage, and caparisons and accoutrements, and subsistence, to be found on such terms? Therefore, suddenly one day she became Mrs. Massinger. Mr. Romaine was thrust with a shock from the low chair.

He was in a fury. He raged as if some personal injury had been done to him. He would have liked to have gone out with a rifle and shot Massinger like a panther. But Mr. and Mrs. Massinger were away, going to spend the winter at Rome. He now discovered that he loved this girl. The gaunt face glowed with colour; the man who had seen savage women until he had begun to think the whole sex mere cattle, was in sore distress.

He had begun to know Pauline about this time.

She laughed openly at his troubles; fanciful, she called them. He did not much care how she received them; all he wanted was some one to make company while he talked, and sometimes "crooned" over himself, and more often sprang from the low chair, and tramped heavily up and down with long strides on her carpet. She bore with him patiently, and often without speaking, sometimes throwing on fuel, as it were a log of wood, quietly.

"This is all your own pride, which has been touched," she would say. On this he would stop his striding, pulling himself up, as if he were a strong horse, and would begin champing his bit impatiently, and pawing the carpet, fixing on her a strange half fierce look from his bright eyes. Then he launched into harangues, half invective and half expostulation. This was one pattern of many such scenes. It fell in with his daily life, and about every second or third afternoon a huge rough poncho of his was lying on the hall table, and the heavy hollow beat of his stride was heard on the floor overhead.

The house in Alfred-place had a balcony, which was a perfect garden. From the top of the street

was seen what looked like a flower-bed in the air—luxuriant greenery, hanging and clustering, with large bright patch of rich red, so that strangers and passers-by often turned down the street to get a nearer view. A yet brighter patch of colour attracted them when the face of the mistress was seen bent down over her flowers. Not that she fancied gardening, but as she once said in her odd way to Lord Puttenham, who had protested that his gardener should send up a box of rare cuttings and roots from Puttenham, “She liked flowers, because they were *sure* to die.”

Thus was she, one evening about four o'clock, bent down over the balcony, pulling away a living leaf as often as a dead one. The little street was deserted, never at any time having much traffic. Two figures had walked past the top—two girls, as they seemed—who were caught by the bright flash in the balcony, the gorgeous reds—and came down slowly to see better. As they came under, they looked up with women's delight in flowers, and Miss Manuel, who did not care to look at any faces, could not help seeing the upturned ones through the green leaves.

In a second she had flown back into her room,

and rang the bell. "Ask that lady to come in," she said to her servant. "Bring her in; and if she refuses, call me." The servant bowed, and Pauline, shooting a glance round her room, said aloud, "Ah! they are come at last, and it is full time to begin."

It was a lady and her maid that were admiring the flowers. The servant did his office so gravely, discreetly, and impressively, that the lady hovered timorously on the steps. There was a mesmeric influence of cold respect about his sad sphinx eyes which seemed to draw the young Mrs. Fermor inside the open door.

"I am afraid," she said, "that is—really I don't know the lady——"

"She is waiting, ma'am, for you in the drawing-room," said the menial of the stony eyes; and then there came a melodious voice from the stairs, and the figure of Pauline glided towards her. She brought her in, and the cold-eyed closed the door as though he had been a jailor. From this afternoon it all began.

Young Mrs. Fermor, hardly recovered, and still timorous, made as though she would go away again. "You remember that night at the play?"

said Pauline, leading her into the drawing-room, as though it had been a strong-room. "Of course you forget my face. I do not forget yours. The moment I saw you in the box I had a sort of instinct who it was. You must know me, and I want you to like me."

The young girl recollected that theatre very well, and when she was looking up admiring the flowers, also recollected the face she had seen through the leaves. Soft and gentle as she was, and not likely to be flurried into speechless confusion, as hapless Violet would have been, she looked at Pauline for a moment, and said :

"After a time I shall try. I have only seen you once, recollect, and that for a moment."

Pauline smiled. "You have seen more of the world than I have. I wish I had that wise caution. Sit down, won't you, and let us talk? Or, first, let me apologise," added Pauline, dropping her eyes humbly, "for thus violently carrying you into the house. You have a hundred things to do, I am sure; and now that I have seen you and spoken to you——"

A hundred feelings were working in Mrs. Fer-

mor's mind. She recollected the night at the Grand Hotel, and she had accepted her husband's forgetfulness of the lady as though it were truth. But this had not passed out of her mind; it had only been packed up carefully and put by. That little compliment about knowing the world better than the grand, flashing creature before her, had some little sweetness—there was curiosity to know more, to discover more; and so she did not rise to go away.

"We *ought* to know each other well," said Pauline, after a pause, "after all that has happened. It is so curious, our sitting this way together, we two—of all people in the world. There are some—pray forgive me—who could not bear to look at you."

Mrs. Fermor smiled. She was thinking that winners should be gracious always, and could afford to bear much.

"I don't know what to say," she said; "these things *will* come about."

"Of course," said the other, "of course. Well, you are tired of our story and our woes. He has told you of it over and over again—every minute

detail—until you are sick of the whole business. He has described everything to you over and over again.”

The girl coloured. “No, indeed,” she said; “I had no curiosity. I never asked him.”

“Never told you!” said Pauline. “I should have thought it had been the one subject of his mind. It should have been burnt into his brain. I should fancy its haunting him like a nightmare. *You* would fancy so too! Naturally so, only that the subject would not be so welcome to a young wife. You have fitted up your skeleton-closet already, my dear child. No matter; it does as well as other furniture. You are very happy, of course—while that poor darling—you will say at least hers, my sister’s, was a very cruel fate.”

“Why,” said young Mrs. Fermor, “is *she* not happy?”

Pauline looked at her. “Why do you take the *trouble* of acting with me?”

“I protest,” said the other, warmly, “I know nothing—and have heard nothing. Was not her marriage happy?”

Pauline started, gave a half cry. “Marriage! What marriage? Ah, she *was* to have been mar-

ried. Ah! now I see. They have not told you anything. He thought it was better not, as it was only one of the old, old pathetic romantic stories."

Mrs. Fermor was troubled; she looked wondering and timorous at Pauline.

"She died," the latter went on, speaking fast, "poor sweet child; foolishly, I think. Some would have lived on through everything; *she* was only a child, and the idea of being deserted wore her out of life."

"Deserted!" said the other, starting up. "O no. Why, I was told——"

"O, of course," said Pauline, her cheeks glowing; "these were too ugly ideas to be introduced to a young bride! Ah! and yet it was a cruel, cruel story."

Young Mrs. Fermor, greatly shocked, could only say, "I never heard, indeed I did not. O, this is dreadful; poor, poor child. I am *so* grieved."

Pauline looked at her half scornfully.

"That should be all over now, and time should have healed—what's the phrase? Yes, Mrs. Fermor, death had to be called in to make a place for *you*. In some of the long nights, get Captain

Fermor to tell you all the details. By-and-by, you will discover other secrets which he has not yet told you. But all in good time."

Mrs. Fermor was all confused, almost overwhelmed by this news, and looked at her helplessly. Just then the door opened sharply, and a heavy figure swung in. It was the Mr. Romaine, who was so handsomely gaunt.

CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH.

MR. ROMAINE.

HIS tread became heavy, as he saw there was some one else present. He flung himself with open ill humour on to a seat, casting a look of impatience at the lady in shawl and bonnet, who was so perversely in the way.

"This is Mrs. Fermor; don't you remember, Mr. Romaine? You were introduced before; for shame! You should send and have your memory cleaned and oiled."

Romaine looked at her angrily; pushed the low chair back.

"I want to recollect as little as I can, as you know," he said, bluntly; "I am sick of remembering. I wish the whole machine was worn out."

"You have been in France——" said Pauline. "Yet no Frenchman would have made such a speech."

"Frenchman!" he said, with contempt. "I mean no offence to your visitor, and if any one is offended, I am sure I am ready to apologise. But I say still, thank God I am not a Frenchman. Better the lowest English boor before that!"

He thus artfully escaped a special acquaintance with the visitor, keeping her under the general category of "a lady." Young Mrs. Fermor—now yet recovered from the strange things she had been hearing; and this wonder mixed itself with yet another wonder at this strange person, also with a little pique at his rudeness—said, softly, "I am not the least offended. I must say a word, though, for our low English boors; I have always found *them* polite."

She said this very naturally, and perhaps meant nothing special, after all. Pauline smiled. Romaine looked at Mrs. Fermor fixedly for a moment.

"Out of the mouths of babes, *you* know——" said Pauline; "rather it is not likely you *should* know. Take care."

He said nothing, but got up and began to pace. "I hear, after all," he said, "they will not go to Rome. That fellow has listened to reason at last."

"To the doctors?" said Pauline.

"To *reason*, I said!" he replied, stopping suddenly before them, laughing grimly. "Poor Virginia's chest is made of gauze; a Roman winter for *her*—God help her, when it all begins so wisely as *that*, how will it go on?"

"O, very well," said Pauline, calmly; "he will make a very good serviceable creature; kind and thoughtful, better than a hundred of your showy theatrical men, who wish marriage to be *all* Husband, and Lord, and a Hairdresser's Bust."

Young Mrs. Fermor sighed deeply, and even loudly. Pauline's eyes floated round significantly to Mr. Romaine's eyes. That sigh saved ten minutes' explanation afterwards. Then Mrs. Fermor rose to go. She bowed with a timidity not unacceptable to him, who returned it with a gracious ungraciousness. Pauline went out with her.

"You must excuse him," she said; "he is in an odd state at present, and we have all to humour

him. A girl he liked has just married, and he is suffering, poor soul. Shall we see each other soon? I want you to love me. I do indeed. I live in the solitude of the world. I have no one to care for me since my poor darling was taken from me. You *know* it was hard, since she was not to go with him, that she could not have stayed with us. Won't you love me?"

Mrs. Fermor saw her eyes glistening. She was conqueror, and could be generous. Pressing her hand, she said, "Indeed I will."

Coming back to her drawing-room, Pauline found the steady pacing going on.

"You seem to have a good deal to say at the door there," he said. "Is the lobby to become the drawing-room?"

Pauline laughed. "How intolerant!" she said; "intolerant even of a simple girl like that."

"Simple, indeed," he said, still pacing. "Who is she, pray?"

"I should tell you nothing," said Pauline; "you had a field for yourself, and one of these Frenchmen you despise so would have shone. However, you confounded her, I think—I suppose she had not seen so wild a being in her life."

"Folly!" he said, roughly. "Simple enough, though. Who is she?"

"A married girl. This is her third moon."

"I remember the husband now—a stick, and a conceited stick. A stick I should like to break across my knee."

"She is a half school-girl," said Pauline, "full of wonder and admiration for anything wonderful or admirable. One of the true worshipping souls—the rarest kind of this sort of virtù."

He stopped pacing. "I have given up collecting," he said.

"The marriage, I suspect," continued Pauline, opening and shutting a fan, "will not be the happiest. He is fine and vain. He is *de par amours*, as the old French romancers say; his head is turned with conquests. There was a poor girl—No matter."

There was scorn in Mr. Romaine's face. He was intolerant. "I knew he was a stick," he said. "I took his measure for a prig at the first glance."

"There," said Pauline, laughing, "make her one of your vestals. She is actually made to worship. Don't you see devotion in her eye,

poor soft child? There are many weary moments in the day, you know, hard to fill up."

Thus Miss Manuel and Mr. Romaine talked until the lamp was brought in. Then the Bishop of Leighton Buzzard came in, bringing with him those finely-turned ebony legs; and, after the bishop, the pleasant reviewer; and, after him, the general company. A crowd of faces—many false, many indifferent; but by-and-by appeared among them one *true* one—that of Young Brett.

An officer-child or an officer-boy in that company would have been wholly irrelevant. He would have fallen upon evil days, and have been stoned—that is to say, politely jeered out of the place. But Pauline honoured and even loved that faithful young soldier.

"No one must touch my terrier," she said.

For him there was always a happy smile. She was glad when she saw his figure. His ready service—his faithful devotion in old cruel days, now happily far off, were not to be forgotten. Indeed, his true and simple devotion had been made manifest in a hundred kind and useful ways; and, so long as he had stayed at Eastport, he had

watched tenderly over that quiet marble slab which rested over poor Violet. When the regiment moved, which it did in about a year, Pauline, returning home, discovered that he had privately salaried an assistant in a nursery-garden to look after the weeds, and such little gardening as would be wanting.

But, in that mixed company, his own merits soon exempted him from any protection. This day he came and was welcomed by Pauline, who had not seen him for a fortnight. He sat down beside her. "Do you remember your wondering," he said, "what had become of that man at Eastport—that Major Carter?"

Pauline's eyes flashed.

"Yes—yes," she said, hastily; "and have you heard anything?"

"I saw him to-day," said Young Brett. "I never liked him. But I went up and spoke to him. I found out all about him."

"Yes," said Pauline, with great interest; "go on. You are the most useful friend I have."

"Nonsense, Miss Manuel," said he, colouring under this praise; "you will spoil me. He has

been abroad. Some little town in France. He is in mourning, and has lost his wife; in great grief, I suppose."

"Lost his wife! And is he going back to France?" said Pauline, eagerly.

"Dear no!" he said; "has just taken a house; he told me his address; asked about you."

"He *did*?" said Pauline, with compressed lips.

"O yes," said Young Brett; "and soon after we parted at the corner of Pall-Mall. I was going to the club, and he went to the Irrefragable Insurance Company."

"Insurance Company!" said Pauline; "why, what for?"

"I don't know," said Young Brett, in a little distress at not having made this out; "but I could ask, you know—find out——"

"No, no," said Pauline; "it is nothing. Thanks. You are always good to me, and useful. Now, hand the bishop his tea."

And to the bishop, whose turned ebony limbs lay over each other like two miniature gymnastic clubs reposing in a corner, he hurried over, eagerly bearing a cup of tea.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST.

THE HOUSE IN CLARGES-STREET.

CAPTAIN FERMOR, having now done with the army, and failed in his Indian profession, had been washed ashore on the great London strand. How interminable that strand is; how barren, how miserable, for all such new waifs and strays, has been over and over again proved. Fermor, a young man, and, as men go, not by any means a dull man, met with a few stray inhabitants on this lonely coast, running down from their huts; that is to say, from a club or two: but in London practically he had only a few acquaintances, and scarcely any friends.

He had come home with Sir Hopkins, had passed

up through the south of France, and had made that dramatic morning call just as he had promised. He had heard of Violet's death, and had been much affected, but that was long, long before. He was not well off: he stopped with this family rather longer than a mere morning call required, and, before very long, the marriage was settled on, and it was known that "Fermor had picked up an heiress," and also "an old father." There was some truth in this last odd expression, for Mr. Carlay gave his daughter fifty thousand pounds, after this fashion: It was conveyed to trustees for "her use for life," and afterwards to Fermor absolutely.

"I cannot live without my daughter," he said, half piteously. "You might cut me off water, or bread, or meat, or even air. I have lived with her always; I cannot part with her now in my old age. I will make it up to you. You shall see I shall. I know how young married people do. If it was settled on her, you would soon come to think me in the way, and I should have to go. Now I shall have a stake in the house. No, no. I will do everything; you shall see."

Fermor smiled at this foolish eagerness. It was

an exceptional arrangement certainly, but after all he was a quiet old man—clay in a fashionable potter's hands—and the consideration was abundant. Thus the house was furnished and made splendid, and thus a little room at the top of the first flight, leading to the drawing-room, where there was a greenhouse, a study, and a bedroom, became Mr. Carlay's home, where he read French and Spanish books. It rolled on very smoothly for some weeks. Then Fermor began to weary a little.

Fermor alone, and Fermor doubled, were two different things in fashionable life. He had hung a millstone of disability about his own neck. Young Mrs. Fermor could not show her passports, or her papers were not "in rule." A pleasant wandering man was always welcome: he filled in gaps in the ranks. But when it was given out that he had married "some low creature," and the knowing him entailed knowing the low creature, it was perceived that the game was not altogether worth the candle. And thus it was that in crowded London he began to find himself in a sort of elegant desert.

This he did not at all relish. He loved the old

incense, the incense which in private drawing-rooms ladies were accustomed to swing before him from little feminine censers. There were none now to swing; rather, the censers were busy before other images. He resented all this bitterly, just as a reduced gentleman resents the loss of luxuries, and came home of evenings to domestic joys, very moody and silent.

He thought very often of the hapless Violet. It seemed to him a very pretty romance, and it became sweet to him to dwell on it. The whole was a soft picture to look back to, and he felt deeply and sorrowfully, as he thought of her sad end. Yet the feeling was not ungrateful. It was a sort of pet flower-garden, into which he retired at times to walk. And he thought very, very often of the splendid flashing sister, and their dramatic night outside the café, and of "the curiously strange impression" he seemed to make upon her. He felt a sort of restless wish to meet her again, and know more of those soft details which almost fell into the shape of a dream. He made many inquiries, but could not find her out. He had no clue. He asked those who might have known, but without success.

Suddenly one evening, on the steps of his club, he met Young Brett, whom he had not seen since an Eastport day, ever so long ago, and the day of an Eastport little party. But those times were now rolled up and huddled away in a corner—like old canvas scenery.

Young Brett coloured up, gave him a blunt nod, and was passing on. Fermor stopped him. He was quick enough to see this feeling, and was amused; Brett was only a child.

"I am so glad, Brett," said Fermor, putting his arm in the boy's. "Come back in here, I want to talk to you."

The other stood irresolute.

"I have to go——" he said at length. "The fact is, Fermor——"

Fermor was, luckily, in a good humour that evening. "The fact is," he said, "you are crusty to-night, and not so glad to see an old friend as you ought to be. Come. I am going your way, whatever way it is. There."

Young Brett was no match for handling of this sort. "Now," said Fermor, after they had walked a few moments, "what is the matter? What have I done to you? Have I not always tried to be

kind to you—done everything I could, in my small way?”

“O yes, yes,” said Young Brett, a little ashamed; “but—but—O, Fermor, how *could* you do that—it was dreadful. Such misery, such ruin! If indeed it had been to *me*, how glad I should have been. But that poor sweet innocent girl. It killed her, Fermor, it did indeed, as much as if you had poisoned her or stabbed her.”

Fermor was silent a moment. Something like shame was in his cheeks. Yet there was something in this honest young creature he could not be angry with. “Brett,” he said, in a low voice, “you have been hearing these stories. I was very sorry. I *could* not help it. How was I to know? Even her sister, who is the best judge, whom I saw in Paris the other day, she does not believe that idle history.”

“Pauline!” said Young Brett, starting; “you met *her*?”

“To be sure,” said Fermor, confidently. “Ask her about it if you like—we had coffee together on the Boulevards. Is she at Eastport still?”

Young Brett—relieved infinitely, and even delighted to find that his friend was in some sort a

true man (for so he now found him, from his faith in anything Miss Manuel did)—became eagerly communicative and told all that he knew, and left Fermor with Miss Manuel's address in Alfred-place, and many other particulars.

Fermor came home pleased with himself, and very gay. The nuptial stage moon was still shining, and the new husband and new wife wore their theatrical dresses and properties for each other's sake. But on this day young Mrs. Fermor had come home sadly troubled and distressed. She had two griefs : a deep and intricate deception practised on herself, and the image of a poor soft girl who had withered away unto death.

She had a little corner or closet of romance into which she retired, and found pleasure in painting up a dreadful picture of desertion, and miserable blight. Not but that this brought with it a sense of conquest for herself ; but there was also present a dread sense of *disquiet*. For already had the glorious sun in whose light she basked sent forth some cold chilling rays, which made her shrink away in a sort of alarm.

By another week—she being now left a good deal alone, with a vague curiosity to know more of the

bright Miss Manuel, and that curious story in which her husband had played such a part—Fermor came to her about noon, and asked would she go for him into the City, and do some small commission? He had West-end business of his own to attend to. For, though he had now no known profession, there was a sort of fiction accepted in the house of his going out each day for business, and of his coming home to dinner after business was done. Would she oblige him in this? said Captain Fermor, ceremoniously, for the stage moon was still shining, and the pantomime running. She was delighted. It fitted in very nicely, and she set out that afternoon with her maid, in a cab.

She had some little commission in some City shop, which was not readily found, and a sort of rude Siberian cabman (with a gaunt angular horse, whose legs swung like a pendulum in a slow trot) had made a low grumbling protest at each fresh direction. When, finally, he was bidden from the heart of the City to make straight for Alfred-place, at Brompton, he began to dwell with savage irony on the advantages of having “a ’os of hiron,” and to hint at young Mrs. Fermor’s “calling ’erself a lady,” which she had not done, though perhaps

considering the title implied. Taking a kind of short cut, the Siberian cabman got into a network of slums and narrow streets, devoted to ancient smelling fishes, and meat perhaps as old, and, to the general furnishing of a larder, mostly in a state of decay. Where, too, were some old book-stalls and some curiosity shops. And here, while turning a corner, the pendulum limbs of the cab-horse slipped from beneath him, and he was on the stones—himself as rough and as angular as a heap of stone.

In an instant there was a crowd; a crowd that came from behind the ancient meats and ancient fishes, and out of dark places yet farther behind, just like brigands stopping a diligence. The two women inside, long since in trepidation at these strange regions, were now filled with terror, especially when the Siberian, instead of striving to raise his beast, came straight to the window, and began to assail them publicly as the authors of the misfortune. This was “wot it was come to,” he said, still maintaining the irony. He hoped they liked it, and “was proud of their work.”

“Let us out! let us out! Do, please,” said

Mrs. Fermor, as the ring of faces drew closer to listen.

The Siberian put his hands in his pockets. "You want to see it, do ye? Nice ladies, eh! Now," he said, suddenly growing savage, "wot are you going to do? Come?"

"O, this is dreadful!" said Mrs. Fermor. "Help us, do. Do, please, let us out. Here is money."

They had only a few shillings. At the other side, where the glass was up, raw unshaved faces were pressed against it, looking in. There was much merriment and great curiosity abroad as to the result of this pleasant scene.

"Do you suppose," the Siberian added, with a loud bang on the door that made the whole cab clatter—"do you suppose that you're to go about all day a killin' 'orses on honest men, with a drive here, and a drive there, and then not pay for your game? I tell you wot——"

"We are ladies; indeed we are. Here is our address, and Captain Fermor——"

The Siberian laughed. "I want no captings I wants my money, and I wants my 'orse. And I tell you, you don't go till I gets one or the other

Ain't it a shame," he added, turning to the crowd, "for people as dresses as ladies, and——"

In utter despair, young Mrs. Fermor had been looking across the wild faces, and beyond the wild faces. Suddenly she saw a tall gentleman—a European, as it were, among the Indians—picking a way round the outskirts of the crowd. In an instant she had called to him. "O, sir, sir! Do come here! Help us! do, please."

The tall gentleman stopped a second, listened, then shrugged his shoulders, and was passing on. That stopping showed Mrs. Fermor his face—the "gauntly handsome" face—and the trailing moustache.

"O, Mr. Romaine," she said, in a lower voice. "Do come to me!"

Slowly Mr. Romaine swung his way through them. The crowd was knocked aside heavily, as though his elbows had been the corners of massive furniture. He was at the window in a moment, confronting the Siberian, on whom he looked down a head taller.

Young Mrs. Fermor, in some confusion, was beginning her story, when he stopped her. "Afterwards, if you like," he said. (Cab, cabman, and

horse, in fact, narrated the whole thing much more shortly.) "Now you had better get out." He took hold of the handle of the door.

"Come, now. I say——" said the Siberian.

Mr. Romaine let it go at once. "Well, open it yourself," said he. "It will save my gloves. And look sharp."

The Siberian was a little staggered. "And who's to pay for the 'os and the damage? This won't do, I say," he said, coming in front of the door.

"Stand back, please," said Mr. Romaine, gently, at the same time calmly pressing his elbow on him. It was like the corner of a chest of drawers. "There—thank you! That will do. You should keep these handles a little freer—oil is not so dear. Take care," he said, in a low warning voice, to him. "You will get into mischief by interfering with me. Stand away! I once killed an Indian with a blow of this fist. I did; on my word. There's my card; I have got *yours*. I shall recollect the number. Here, my friend" (to a smart ostler-looking man), "get this horse on his legs again. He is only shaken. There" (and he put something into the ostler's hands). "And you help

too" (to a parcels boy, whose hand he also visited). "Here" (to the Siberian), "go to the next public with that. Wine makes the heart of man glad—or spirits. Now, Mrs. Fermor, take my arm. I know a short cut out of this place."

He led her away without further protest or obstruction. He was indeed a hero—a quiet, calm, grand hero. With so slight an exertion of power, what might he not accomplish if the occasion required? Women always overflow with gratitude to preservers of this sort—even to those who have saved them from a driver.

Civilised Europe was only a street away after all. Better still, here was a stand of cabs. Then Mrs. Fermor recovered herself, and began to discourse incoherent gratitude.

"Good gracious!" said he, "it is nothing. I heard a lady calling from a cab-window, and I came. Do what we will, we can't make a romance out of it. Now, here is a cab. I suppose I can go now?"

"O, thank you!" said Mrs. Fermor, still overflowing with gratitude. "I don't know what to say, I am sure; how to thank you for such a service, knowing you so little, too."

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"As for that," said he, "I may, without rudeness, relieve your mind. If it had been a washerwoman in her cart, whom I had never seen in my life, I should have done the same. It is really nothing," he said, smiling. "You make too much of it. Here is a cab. Could you spare me now? I really have an appointment."

"O, I am sure," said young Mrs. Fermor, "if we could leave you anywhere, I am sure——"

"I assure you I like to walk, unless," he added, smiling a little contemptuously, "you still think yourself in danger. I assure you this driver looks moral and respectable. Don't be afraid."

A little mortified, she got in, and she saw Mr. Romaine hurry away, apparently glad to be free. The maid pronounced him "a short" gentleman—that is, as regards manner.

Fermor was a long time out, and came home late—with the drum hoisted, as it were. She was not skilled in reading those meteorological signals, and flew at him eagerly with a full narrative of her adventures. It was *such* an escape—such a rescue—and such a rescuer. But Fermor was chafing. He had called twice at a House, and had not been admitted, though he had seen a

bishop's carriage drive up, and finely turned ebony limbs go down its steps, and up other steps into the House. It was an insult, and not a mistake.

Mrs. Fermor's eyes were sparkling as she dwelt on the details of her story. "And would you believe it, Charles, he no more seemed to mind what he had done, than if he had walked across this room."

"Well, I take it all for granted," said her husband, getting up suddenly. "I have heard it three times over now. A cab horse fell down, and a gentleman called another cab for you."

Young Mrs. Fermor coloured.

A cold fog or Scotch mist had covered up the stage moon. Now she saw the drum hoisted—and wounded, withdrew her little narrative.

"Can he be getting *tired* of me already," she thought, a little bitterly. "How cold and cruel he can be." She had a dismal evening before her. The personal worship, the little censers that swung delicate little compliments, and the pretty sweet-smelling vapours of Roger le Garçon, had been tumbled away into a corner. They were tarnished ; they were old plate now.

A note was brought in. She took it, wondering

who was to write her notes. She turned to the signature, and found it signed "Pauline Manuel." As Pauline's face flashed and glittered, so there was something of the same light in these written words, something in the invitation they gave. She had been expecting her, she said. She wished to see her so much, to talk over a hundred matters. "I am alone," said Pauline, "and have a hundred other things I want to keep out of my thoughts. You owe me a debt—you should be generous. *Your husband kindly called twice to-day*, but half by a mistake, half out of intention, was not admitted. I can know *you*, even like you—but him not so much; at least, not for a long time. You will understand this. Come to me to-morrow."

Colour flushed her cheeks. "So *this* is what he is busy with," she said; "carrying on a plot, a mystery. Oh, I am very miserable, very unhappy."

Fermor came in precisely at this unlucky moment. He saw her tell-tale cheeks. He was intolerant, and did not relish any one being out of humour but himself. "What," he said, "not blown over yet? Is it possible that you are dis-

pleased because I did not enter into your cab adventure? Good gracious! Come, now, you won't be so unreasonable." There was an air of sarcastic good humour in his tone, which was a little disagreeable.

Young Mrs. Fermor looked at him tremblingly. Her round red lips were quivering. She was thinking of all her "wrongs" accumulating since the Paris night.

But she answered calmly: "You might reduce every action to that shape, if we looked at it in that sort of light."

Fermor did not like being argued with, so he said, sharply, "And let me tell you, my good child, now that you are come to live in London, that this making a nine days' wonder out of every cab you take, and of every man you pick up out of the street, will lead you into all sorts of embarrassments. Seriously, we should get rid of our little Eastport simplicity, my dear."

Her lips shaped themselves into deep reproach. "How cold, how unkind you are," they seemed to say. Fermor heard these words as much as if they had been spoken. "Go to your father," he said, "and tell *him* about the cab. I have busi-

ness now, my dear—letters. I have been worried all day. The story will amuse him.”

Young Mrs. Fermor, with her round soft cheeks full of colour, was sensitive, and a little quick of temper. Over the pantomime moon a cloud had suddenly spread itself. The soft cheeks were glowing and flaming. “How cold and unkind,” she said, quickly. “I did not expect this from you. If papa knew this——”

Now indeed the colour came to Fermor’s cheeks. “Don’t say that,” he answered, with a trembling voice; “never speak in that way to me, if you wish us to live quietly together. I shall not be intimidated by *his* name. No, I am not come to *that*; no,” continued he, walking up and down, “though people may say I have sold myself ‘into genteel slavery.’”

Now was the fitting time for opening the hysterical flood-gates. Down burst the torrent of tears, carrying with it, like stones, ejaculations of cruelty and unkindness. “Indeed, I might have expected this,” she said. “I was warned in time. And when *she*, poor thing, was treated in *that way*——”

“She! Who?” said Fermor, stopping short in his walk, and turning pale.

“I know it,” said young Mrs. Fermor. “It was

kept very secret ; but I have heard it all. Perhaps it will be *my* fate one of these days. God help me. It was not suitable that I should know it. I was kept in the dark, it seems—un—until—until the slavery—the genteel slavery was accomplished. Yes, I know the whole, though you had *reasons* for not telling me—what the poor girl, now in her grave, who, *I* was told, was married and happy——”

“Never, never!” said Fermor, eagerly. “I did not indeed. I could not tell such a falsehood.” And indeed, to do him justice, he had never said so. “But what is the meaning of this? This is simply absurd. Do let us have no vulgar matrimonial quarrels—not *as yet*, at least,” he added, with a forced smile. He tried thus to sweep away the subject into a corner. But unhappily—to use the odious language of the ring—here was first blood. Very soon the pantomime, with its stage moon, would be withdrawn. The “run” was nearly over.

It was of course patched up ; both shrank a little from this “vulgar quarrelling.” They had not yet learned to cast down the idols, or, at least, to be careless about casting them down.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND.

AT A BROUGHAM WINDOW.

THE Irrefragable Insurance Company, Limited, had a new home in the West-end, a very narrow strip of front, that looked like the "console" of a mahogany sideboard, or like the edge of a thin slice of bride-cake. The small patch of ground upon which it stood would not have furnished room—by way of burial—for many of the "Lives" the office insured; yet, if it had been floored with golden sovereigns instead of encaustic tiles, it would not have represented all it cost. It was doing a thriving business, chiefly from an unquestioned readiness in accepting anything that came loosely under the designation of a Life (even

though the value lay rather in the direction of a Death), and from a profession, not quite so unquestioned, of paying all claims with a readiness that was almost "soft."

In these days a brougham drove up to the door of the Irrefragable—a brougham, no doubt, containing a Life. The Life was a Lady Life. It came in, and the mahogany doors swung to behind it—as it were the lid of a box, shutting down firmly on the Life. The greatness of the business seemed to be revealed in its mahogany, and the Lady Life was reflected in panelling and partitions forward, and from a monster solid counter (that would have dined giants, and borne the weight of their elbows after dinner) upwards.

The Lady Life was a flashing Life, bright, dazzling, and handsomely dressed. The faces of many clerks converged to her with admiration. Mr. Speedy, manager and actuary, imprisoned all day in a little compartment that looked like a mahogany match-box, looked out over the edge to the brilliant Lady Life. Mr. Speedy, who did showy calculations, and furnished the instructive examples out of "The Books of the Company," beginning, "A has insured in the year 1837 for one hundred

pounds," reconnoitred the lady narrowly, for about every Life that entered he did a little exercise to keep his mental hand in. "I know," said Mr. Speedy to himself; "handsome young wife, old husband, with Life utterly uninsurable. *That* won't do here, madam." He listened, as Pauline's soft clear voice travelled to him readily.

She wished to insure her own Life, only for a trifle, say two hundred pounds—say in favour of her brother. Could they oblige her with forms? Mr. Speedy, over the edge of the match-box, had seen the dark brougham—the spectre of the uninsurable octogenarian husband had happily faded out. Here was a case for extended connexion. He came down softly out of his box with forms, and took the case out of the hands of the inferiors.

"You will find everything here," he said, collecting quite a little library of fat almanacks, coloured pictures of the "branches" at Montreal, Dublin, &c. "We offer very advantageous terms. We ask no disagreeable questions, and give as little trouble as we can. I am sure you would not repent coming to us. In fact, if you were satisfied, and would kindly mention us to any of your friends——"

“ I certainly shall,” said Pauline. “ In fact, I have come to you chiefly because a gentleman that I know has been with you—Major Carter.”

Mr. Speedy’s brow contracted. “ Ah ! A claim *that* is ! The most unfortunate transaction we have had yet. Seven thousand pounds, and only two years’ premium paid ! We were advised to resist ; but, as we are a young institution, we thought it better to avoid the—scandal,” said Mr. Speedy, smiling. “ It was the fault of our medical adviser who accepted the lady’s Life too hastily.”

“ Mrs. Carter ? ” said Pauline.

“ Yes,” said Mr. Speedy. “ But we are prepared cheerfully to make any sacrifice—*any* sacrifice to keep up the irrefragable character of our corporation. As we have dealt with Major Carter openly, fairly, and honourably, so, if you honour us, madam——”

“ You will pay my heirs,” said Pauline, smiling, “ as readily as you did Major Carter ? ”

“ The board has not paid yet,” said Mr. Speedy. “ By the terms of our charter, we can keep the policy money nine months. But what is that ? Fairness and honesty before everything.”

Pauline took away her pictures and thick almanacks into her brougham.

Mr. Speedy retired into his match-box, but looked out long over its edge after the bright and fashionable lady who had visited him. He told Mrs. Speedy at dinner of the interview he had had with a very "high" person, indeed, at the office, and he hinted that by his tact and management he had secured that "interest" for the office. He did not know, however, that the "high" lady had thrown herself back in her brougham with a weary air, and had flung down his papers with a sort of disgust. "How I loathe—how I detest myself," she said, "for these meannesses. I am ashamed to hold up my head. But what can I do? Women have no other strength. Trickery and cunning and meanness—this must serve us in the room of brute force. Is my life to become an organised hypocrisy? O, Violet!"

She was coming to the Park. Her face became bright again. She drew herself forward, and looked out proudly from the window. A few people were waiting half way at the crossing to let a string of carriages go by. To her astonishment, she saw young Mrs. Fermor and her maid among

these. In an instant she had the glass down, and was calling to her.

The young wife, unhappy and tossed about by her new bitter troubles, had determined to forswear her society. She shrank even from the name. But now, with Pauline present, it seemed altogether different. She felt herself a mere child before that brilliant woman of the world. There was an influence in her—an absorbing glance—which she could not resist. Miss Manuel bade her send home her maid, and get in. She must come and drive with her, and see the company in the Park. Mrs. Fermor made a faint protest, and put forward her dress, but she was powerless in *those* hands. There was a seduction about Pauline as she made a place for her beside herself, which, for the moment, she did not wish to resist.

She had never yet seen this shape of Vanity Fair—the procession of people of quality moving along like a bright Coventry ribbon. Her lord, Fermor, had always dismissed it as childish, and as a childish taste. Had not *he* seen it over and over again, until he was literally sick of the business? Now it quite dazzled her—the noble horses, and the knights, and the ladies of the knights, and the

wealth that shone with a rawness and vulgarity, and the nobility of birth, that glowed with a rich but subdued quietude. She was delighted with this wonderful show, for she was a rustic.

Even the loungers—who came to stare and perhaps remained to talk—attracted her. She asked about them—about everybody. Pauline was charming—told her all things. “I like you to ask me everything,” she said, “in that natural way. I want you to consult me, and in time to like me, if you *can*.”

“Ah!” said young Mrs. Fermor, stooping forward a little eagerly, and in some confusion, “is not that—yes, I am sure it is——”

“How well you know,” said Pauline, looking at her with a strange quick look. “You are quite right. We shall call him over. Mr. Romaine!”

“No, no! indeed no,” said Mrs. Fermor, hurriedly; “not while I am with you.”

“Nonsense!” said Pauline, smiling. “I know what you are thinking of. You are afraid of him.”

Mr. Romaine, in pale gloves, was at her window. Mrs. Fermor saw the look of impatience on his face as she came into view. “I am always to be

in his way," she thought. "He will be rough to me." He nodded slightly to her.

"So *you* come to the show," he said, "Miss Manuel. Of course you do. And yet I know what you think of the whole business. I am astonished, you that talk so."

"Never mind that now," she said. "You see my friend Mrs. Fermor here?"

"I do," he said, looking down to beat his trousers with his cane; "that is, I should say I have that pleasure."

"Mr. Romaine was so kind to me the other day," said Mrs. Fermor, warmly. "And I am afraid I never thanked him sufficiently for——"

"O," said he, "are we never to be out of that cab! Heaven preserve us! do let us leave it where we left it. I declare—and think me candid, but not rude, please—I am inclined never to go to the assistance of any one in that way again."

Pauline looked from one to the other. Mrs. Fermor showed her confusion and mortification. "Because you," she said, quickly and warmly, "are above all these forms, there is no reason why *we* should be. I assure you it is more from re-

spect to ourselves that we say these things. I should consider myself quite rustic if I passed it over. You must make allowance; you should, indeed."

This was all spoken very hastily, and with a voice that almost trembled. She was a little quick of temper. He looked at her with really blank astonishment. Pauline clapped her hands.

"Exceedingly good," she said. "There, that will do for *you*," and she pressed Mrs. Fermor's arm under her shawl with encouragement. "Charming, my dear," she whispered; "a good lesson. Now, Mr. Romaine, after that, tell us news, wicked news, if you have any. There's old Lady Canonbury rolling by and swinging like Mahomet's coffin. Look, dear; and she is worth looking at, for that spotted and fiery face can be set off with a hundred thousand pounds' worth of diamonds."

But Mrs. Fermor's face was glowing and flushing still, and she was biting her plum-coloured lips with vexation, at the sharp attack of which she had been the subject. These pretty little emotions were as yet a sort of awkward squad, to be trained and drilled into good soldiers by-and-by.

"What about Miss Löreley's match?" cried Pauline. "Come, we wait? Begin."

"Look at *her*," he said, suddenly, "how angry she is! She could grill me now—make a pin-cushion of me—all because I won't be overloaded with thanks. How good!" His eyes were fixed upon her as if she was some show or exhibition. Mrs. Fermor only flushed the more.

"No, indeed," she said, "I don't care in the least. You quite mistake. But I think you need not have been so excited about my little thanks."

"Excited!" he said, smiling. "Who here is excited? *I* am not. I only speak for myself."

"It's *not* about that, then?" said Mrs. Fermor.

"What isn't about that, then?" he said, still amused. "I protest I don't follow."

Still, really angry, she would not answer, but looked out of the window.

"I won't have this," said Pauline. "You must go away; you are creating a disturbance. The savage is breaking out. If you really want a battle, you may have it in my house, with decency, at the usual hour. There, go." And she drew up the glass and bade the coachman drive home.

"O," said Mrs. Fermor, suddenly, "I don't know what you will think of me. I am quite ashamed of myself, and of such temper."

Miss Manuel laughed. "It was capital," she said. "You have done him a world of good. I, who am not in *much* terror of him, could not have said it. Ah! I see you are clever."

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Fermor. "Charles often tells me I am a child still."

At that name Miss Manuel started a little. "Some men would have us children always. Our poor Violet would have been a child always. Sometimes, looking at you as I do now, it reminds me of her—something in the tone, something in the manner. Ah, poor Violet!"

Mrs. Fermor saw the deep eyes glistening. She was quick and impulsive in all emotions. She put her hand affectionately on Miss Manuel's arm.

"*Indeed*, I feel for you," she said, "and all about *that*. Indeed I do. It makes me miserable at times to think of it. Though I had never seen her, someway I felt as if it had been for my *own* sister. And for *you*, too," she added, "who loved her so dearly."

Pauline drew away from her suddenly with a

startled look, and began to talk rapidly. "Yes, I know," she said; "a sad story. A sensation incident they would call it now," she added, with a smile, but a very mournful smile.

They were at Alfred-place, and had the unfailing tea. "We shall have a quiet talk together," said Miss Manuel; "you on that sofa, I on this. The mob won't be here for an hour to come. This will be delightful. Talking of poor Romaine, there is something to be said for him now. He is scarcely an accountable being. You would hardly guess that he is in a very wild state of mind."

Mrs. Fermor looked curious.

"Yes," said Pauline, "I could tell you a long history about *that*. There was a girl he fancied, and who, he tells me, fancied him. As you know, that is good authority; but no matter. These rough savages, as you can fancy, when they *do* love, love like a hurricane—like a storm. Well, she has just married—a good match, too."

Really interested, and not without a little compunction, Mrs. Fermor waited for more. Women delight in these little dramas.

"So, after all," said Miss Manuel, "we should not be very hard on him. You can understand

what a struggle is going on. He wants to be good, and to do the right thing, and we should help him, if we can. He thinks the newly married pair are to be away for the winter, in Rome; but the worst is, I know that they are to be here. Their plans have been changed. So I say we must help him, and be indulgent. Don't you think so?"

At this moment, the tall figure which they were to help came swinging in. "I knew we should have you," said Miss Manuel, half scornfully. "You may sit down, however."

Mr. Romaine dropped instinctively into his low chair. "I told you I was coming," he said. "When I get into the habit of a thing, I must go on, even if I am not in the humour. So—I had to come."

"Polite always," said Miss Manuel. "Tea?"

"No," he answered, bluntly; "I don't care for that. Once a sharp thing has been said to me," he said, fixing his eyes directly on Mrs. Fermor, "it puts me out for everything—even for that sort of wash."

Mrs. Fermor coloured at this allusion, which she understood perfectly.

"I never meant, I am sure," she said, casting down her eyes. "I thought you——"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Romaine, as if he was in the hunting-field. "There's human nature! We apply everything to ourselves. Alas! we are always the first object in our own thoughts."

Another sort of colour was hurrying to Mrs. Fermor's cheeks at this fresh outrage, when he added, slowly:

"Not but that, in the present case, you were right. I *was* alluding to you."

Again, in fresh confusion, Mrs. Fermor, vexed with him, with the situation, with everybody, but mostly with herself, hurriedly rose to go. He lifted himself hastily.

"Going home?" he said, "thinking me, of course, a Honolulu islander. Well, I can't help it; I can't change my spots. But I can do this—beg pardon. Forgive. I don't mean all I say or do."

Mrs. Fermor looked up at him with more confidence, and a smile. She was hopelessly mortified at these ups and downs, but gave him her hand. Pauline came out with her, and kissed her. "You are a wonderful creature," she said; "you amaze

me. I could not *dare* to go on in that way. I must see you again soon. You have promised me, mind."

As the young wife passed out, Miss Manuel, staying on the stairs, and looking after her, dropped her hand on the banister, and stamped her foot with what seemed a sudden pain. "Poor innocent!" she said, "is she beginning to like me? How like to——" Then she turned sharply round, and walked back into the drawing-room.

"There!" she said, half contemptuously, "you have found a sensible woman at last, on whom all your fine tragedy is thrown away. Now, is your mind at rest? What can repay you for the lost time?"

He began to pace the room, impatiently biting his moustache. He looked at her angrily. "So she defies me through you? Take care. That is not to be done to me."

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD.

A HOLLOW WORLD.

CAPTAIN FERMOR, very restless—destitute, as it were, as regards that pleasant sort of romance which used to be his daily food—was in a state of impatient hostility with the world in which he lived. On this very day he had determined to go and spend a pleasant tranquil afternoon with Miss Manuel, and thus work the current clear. One of the *old* pleasant conversations—a conversation, that is, where *he* talked, and brought out the fine Arabian ^{7.}to eye, now, alas! too long in stable.

That wild notion of her not seeing him, which presented itself to him as he walked, must have

been a mistake or misconception. Perhaps—and it was the *ro eyw* whispered this—perhaps she felt there was some of the *old* danger in these retired interviews, and was wary in exposing herself to risk. At this notion he smiled, and patted the Arabian's neck with fondness.

He was smiling as he was just turning into Alfred-place. He saw the balcony, and the flowers in the balcony; but he suddenly saw under the balcony a lady coming out on the steps. The lady wore a dress and a bonnet which he thought he knew; and, looking closer, he recognised young Mrs. Fermor, his wife.

He was thunderstruck—speechless. This, then, was it. Ah! *this* explained it all. *Here* was the interference that had closed the door against him. With bitterness on his lips he turned away full of anger. “Upon my word, it has come to a pretty pass!”

He thought first of hurrying after her and convicting her in her “spy system” at once. But this seemed imprudent: he could not trust himself in the street. How was he to pay his visit? He was “upset”—not “in tone” to be smiling and fluent. It was always the way. Besides, he

thought bitterly, the door was effectually closed *now*.

He walked away very fast, came through the Park, where the gay ribbons were still winding round, and the gaudy flags of fashion still flying. "All *here* should be *my* friends," he said; "*my* true sphere until I lost it." And he stood at the rail, and saw the thousand-and-one little boudoirs on wheels pass him, now stopping, now going on. He knew everybody—by sight at least. The men perched high, driving spirited horses, and the young girls in the tiny boudoirs. Suddenly he started.

"I declare," he thought. "Old friends. I am so glad." And he was at the window of a little chamber in a moment.

These were some "Craven people," a mother and daughters, who lived in the purest fashionable air. Sojourned permanently in ball-rooms, and occasionally went out to their own home. To him they were always kind. He had leave to come in when he pleased, and at every dinner they gave, dined, as of course. They allowed him to do a hundred things *for* them—the best proof of fashionable intimacy and affection. Fermor's eyes

lighted with complacent delight as he drew near to the window. He was thinking what a surprise for them.

At the same moment a tall gaunt man was raising his hat and approaching the window. There were smiles of welcome, three smiles of welcome, and three "O! Mr. Romaine"s.

Fermor, a little disordered, said: "O, Mrs. Craven! So glad, I am sure——"

The three faces looked at him. One, a younger and simpler face—she showed no scars as yet—said, softly:

"Mamma, Mr. Fermor! You know——"

"Ah, to be sure. How-de-do, Mr. Fermor? So long, you know——"

"O, Mr. Romaine! we have been *dying* to see you. Why didn't you come?"

The other girl, who was her mother's sergeant, said:

"Ah, you didn't care. I know *I* never missed you."

FERMOR. I am so glad, Mrs. Craven. I am sure I have been (this spoken a little sadly) all over the world since I saw you.

MRS. CRAVEN (with no curiosity). Indeed. O, of course. But, Mr. Romaine——

FERMOR. It is so curious meeting in this way——

THE SERGEANT. You *won't* tell us? No? I said so to mamma. No, you won't.

MR. ROMAINE (gently pressing on Fermor to the window). I *beg* your pardon—*would* you? Thanks! (Fermor now behind, with only a glimpse of the boudoir, over a steep hill formed by Mr. Romaine's back.)

MISS CRAVEN (with a little pity for Fermor; but her voice does not reach over the hill). Have you been quite well, Mr. Fermor?

FERMOR (glowing, raging, biting his lip, and not knowing what to do). Good morning, Mrs. Craven.

Three eager smiles are shaken at him like three white handkerchiefs, and he gets off the stage somehow. Looking back, he sees Mr. Romaine bent, as he leant on the carriage window, looking after him with a grim smile. If he had been near, he would have heard Mrs. Craven say, in answer:

"O, one of the girls' friends. Now, I am told, he has picked up some low creature, and thinks he is to be all the same. It really is so disagreeable both for him, and for us!"

"Quite understand," said Mr. Romsine. "There are fellows who never take a hint."

That was a gloomy walk of Fermor's! "Heartless set," he said. "They *might* have recollected all I have done for them, and all the money they have cost me. I suppose they think nothing more is to be got now that I have"—and he laughed—"done for myself. *They* are no loss, at any rate."

Suddenly he thought of his relation, Sir Hopkins, whom he knew was in Town, but whom he had never yet found time to go and see. Somehow he had rather shrank a little from the meeting, for he had not consulted him about this marriage. He was in. It was close on six o'clock, and Sir Hopkins was writing. He was still boring into the old diplomatic molehills—still burrowing, tunnelling, indefatigably. Only now, as he grew older, the molehills grew smaller and meaner, and the tunnels narrower. The awful whisper had

even been heard in F. O. corridors that "Old Pockock's day" was "gone by," and younger servants used the word "fogie." With reference to his last experiment, it was said plainly and firmly, "You know he broke down. Lord Radley insisted, and they had to give it to him. He was in one of his mulish fits—thought they were putting him off—and so fixed on this. He was very sorry for it afterwards, though."

When Fermor came in, he was in a molehill, tunnelling away. Letters to one, letters to the other; to lords, to no lords; to official, to non-official. Was there a little pin, resting on a lever, which lay on another lever, which was one of a thousand other little levers, to move the great machine—he sent a letter to that pin. Was there a thread hanging down among a cloud of threads—was there a loose wire among a million of loose wires—was there a fly upon the great wheel—he addressed dismal letters to that thread, to that wire, and to that fly. He was still intriguing for office, as he had intrigued forty years before, that is, calling letters intrigues.

He looked up as Fermor entered, and looked

down. His pen was in the middle of a sentence. "Sit down," he said; "excuse me." He wrote on for a minute or two, then stopped.

"Glad to see you," he said, coldly. "How have you been? Now what is it? What do you want me to do? I have no interest *now*, you know."

"I merely came to see you, sir," said Fermor.

"O, *that* was it," said the diplomatist, beginning to write again. "I have not been so well, lately. To tell you the truth," he added, abruptly, "I am very busy, as you see, and——"

"O, certainly," said Fermor, rising, with a wounded air; "you need not stand on ceremony with me, sir."

Sir Hopkins looked at him a moment. "So you married, it seems. I dare say you find a change."

Fermor said, "How, sir?" a little doubtfully.

"Why, the life, the attention, the consideration. I know how soon *that* comes, unless you dazzle them with what you have done."

"I don't want to dazzle anybody," said Fermor, in some confusion

"No; that was pretty plain," said the other.

"No fear of *that*. 'Pon my soul, Charles, I had hoped better things of you; I had indeed. In plain words, you threw yourself away—you did. We would have made a man of you, if you had let us."

"Why, God bless me, sir," said Fermor, with great warmth. "Did you not advise me yourself? Did you not get with the father, and keep saying to me, 'There was a match?' Surely you remember?"

Sir Hopkins shook his head. "I am sorry to see this," he said. "You are only a novice, after all. Why, couldn't you see that was all my little foreign office business—setting up one girl to bring down the other?"

"And you *did* bring her down," said Fermor, bitterly. "I believe it had been better for me, after all, if I had cast my lot with one who loved me, and who, I believe, died for me, instead of being made the object of foreign office business, as you say."

"That was all a matter for your own choice," said Sir Hopkins, calmly. "But, to tell you the truth, I don't follow the tone of this discussion. On this occasion, I think it right to tell you plainly,

Charles, to prevent misconception hereafter"—and Sir Hopkins paused a little, and looked at him meaningly—"that I am not altogether pleased. You have taken your course, and disappointed me; made what I can only call a low marriage, without connexion or rank. I don't like the transaction, and I say so. You understand?"

"Well, sir," said Fermor, with a wounded defiance, "it can't be helped. I am sorry for it."

"I don't care telling you now that it has been a disappointment, and a great one, to me. I don't choose to be disappointed. I don't mind telling you now, that I had a girl for you, ready and waiting—a girl out of our office. Such a connexion! Why were you so sudden about it. It took my breath away when I heard it, and brought back that old pain under the shoulder-blade. Good God! What a fool you made of yourself! Good-by, Charles. I am fearfully busy. I am afraid I shall be very busy for the next few weeks."

Fermor came home, straight to his home, his cheeks tingling. "This is what I have brought myself to," he said, with utter bitterness and ruefulness. He was dreadfully mortified and wounded. He beat the rails impatiently with his cane as he

passed by. Coming to his house, he went sadly into the drawing-room, where was young Mrs. Fermor waiting.

"Dinner is spoiled," she said, ringing the bell. "Three-quarters of an hour!"

He flung himself on a sofa. "What does it matter?" he said. "I am late for everything now. It is a wonder you waited for me."

She looked at him astonished.

"Yes," he went on, "why should any one take the trouble? I am not worth it. Everybody can treat me as they please, it would seem. Good gracious!" and he started up, "it seems like a conspiracy to mortify and humiliate me."

The young wife went up close to him, full of sympathy. "Dear Charles," she said, "tell me about your troubles. Indeed I feel for you. What is it? Who has hurt you?"

"Such treatment!" he went on, angrily. "Mrs. Craven, Sir Hopkins, and the rest of them! As if there was some mark on me. What do you suppose my crime is? Throwing myself away, as they call it; making a low marriage."

Deeply hurt, and with deep reproach, she said: "O, Charles, you *cannot* mean this?"

"I don't mean it," he said; "but they all tell me so. The world is right, it seems. Else, why do they mortify and insult me at every turn, as if I had done a crime? It's not your fault. I should, of course, be a monster to say so. But no man has paid so heavily as I have for any act of his life. There's Sir Hopkins, too, has hinted plainly he means to punish me, because he doesn't approve. The women in the Park will hardly deign to speak to me. Is not this pleasant? Delightful sauce to flavour one's dinner with!"

At this moment entered the stiff, grim father, who, in this new shape of life, rarely seen, and emerging for meals from his secluded quarter on the stairs, was as grim, and rigid, and metallic as of old. The old casting was sharp and hard as ever.

He stood in the doorway a moment; then, without a word, turned and went down. The others followed. It was a silent and solemn meal. A blank had fallen on them all. Fermor cut his food savagely and defiantly. At the end—Mr. Carlay never sat over wine, but was absorbed silently into his quarter—if Fermor was out, he came and read to his daughter. Now, at the end

of dinner, when she was gone up to a dismal meditation by the fire, and Fermor was thinking of a lonely night walk, just as dismal, the cast-iron figure said: "Would you wait a moment, Fermor? I want to speak to you."

A little surprised, the other came back.

"Take your seat again," said Mr. Carlay. "I wish to say a few words to you seriously. It will save a good many more serious, later."

Fermor did not like this magisterial tone, and perhaps, on another occasion, would have said something about this "solemn preface."

"Mary is not looking well," Mr. Carlay went on. "She is growing unhappy. I have remarked it for some time." He paused a second or two. "Are you as kind to her as you should be?"

Fermor started. "I should hope so," he answered. "Why should you ask me such a question?"

"As you ask me," said the other, "I will tell you. Because I begin to think you are not. People think, because I live out of the world—as it were out of the house almost—that I see nothing, and know nothing. Never was there a greater mistake, if that be the impression that

directs any particular course of conduct. I see everything, and know everything."

Often and often had Fermor laid it down at mess, and at other places where he, as it were, sat judicially, that anything like lectureship from a person in the relation that Mr. Carlay was to him, would be fatal. From the outset he had settled that such encroachment was to be resisted at once. He thought of this now.

"Whatever there is to see and know, you are welcome to," he said, calmly. "Perhaps, if you did mix a little more in human concerns, you would have truer views of things. I hope I behave as well as most husbands do. I know my duty, whatever complaints may have been made to you," he added, with some meaning.

Mr. Carlay was growing more grim, and dense, and hard, every moment. His lips scarcely seemed to move as the words passed from them. "Look here," he said; "Fermor. I do not want to interfere with you: hitherto I have not done so. If you only hint it, you shall see even less of me than you have done. Those rooms up-stairs make up my world, and—my daughter. But I tell you this now—and I tell it to you solemnly—if I find the slightest change towards

HER"—here he stood up and seemed to grow in gaunt height into a stark prophet—"if she is not treated gently, tenderly, softly, even childishly—if she is not humoured and petted, and made the queen and darling of this house, as she has always been of mine, I declare there will come a change over me that you cannot dream of. You don't know me. You don't know what I can be, or what I have been. But I warn you now in time. Touch her, and you touch me. I am willing to be tranquil for this life, and go out of life peacefully, after all the storms I have passed through. But one other sign of what I have seen this evening, and I become what I would not become. You are no match for me. Come now," he said, suddenly changing his tone, "you have sense and tact, and will take this in good part. But, believe me, nothing was ever meant so much in earnest, or will so surely come to pass."

He left Fermor speechless, and really overpowered by this denunciation. The gaunt figure seemed to grow as it spoke. Its eyes flashed, and there was an air of undefined menace. Fermor knew not what to say or to reply, but felt his strange influence, and shrank away from collision with this wild being, whom he now saw in a new

light. But he went forth upon the night in a storm of humiliation and passion, scarcely knowing what he was doing. He thought not so much of the degrading intimidation which had been tried on him that night, as of the unworthy "delation"—the complaint that must have been made by Mrs. Fermor—which he should register and never forgive. If the world was in a conspiracy against him, he had strength enough to do battle with it. But for *her*—she who had dared to behave in *that* way—he could not bring himself to think of it. With that violent and dangerous Carlay it would not do to quarrel openly, but to her he could mark it in a cold, cutting, quiet way that she should *feel*. So, when he came home that night again, there was upon him a new, formal, chill sort of manner, a kind of icicle politeness, under whose touch she seemed to wither away. She had an instinct what it came from, and with timidity tried to make some excuse or extenuation, but shrank away from his cold look of wonder and colder disclaimer. On this night a domestic Nemesis seemed to have entered into the house, and from this night it was steadily busy at its work.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

CONSTRUCTING A WEB.

IN a day or two Miss Manuel's brougham was standing at the door of the "Irrefragable," and Miss Manuel herself inside, reflected in the highly-polished official mahogany.

Mr. Speedy had come specially from his box with yet more "irrefragable" literature, for the bright lady seemed to be an eager student of the little tables, and could not have enough of the supposititious A who had insured for one hundred pounds at the age of twenty-one years, and who in a surprisingly short time had come in for "bonuses," and other good things, to the amount of five or six times his policy. Not without interest,

too, were the "fatal warnings" against improvidence. Miss Manuel still could not make up her mind.

"We should be delighted at any time," said Mr. Speedy, "at *any* time, to purchase up the policy at its full value."

"I know," said Miss Manuel, leaning on her round hand. "That would be charming. If poor Mrs. Carter could have done that," she added, smiling.

Mr. Speedy's brow contracted; he only liked dwelling on the bright side of the company's affairs. "We don't accept Major Carter's," he said, "as a pattern case. If we did, we might close. We do not consider that he has behaved well in the transaction. But our practice is to shut our eyes to a certain extent, and maintain an 'irrefragable' principle."

"Where did poor Mrs. Carter die?" said Miss Manuel. "I knew them very well."

Mr. Speedy, not at all displeased to be seen by the office on terms of agreeable familiarity with a "fine woman," became almost confidential.

"At an out-of-the-way place," he said, "Bangor; and in, it seems, an out-of-the-way part of Bangor.

We had a scarcely recognised agent there—a post-mistress, I think—and we never dreamed of business in such a place. However, we received the proposal, and the board accepted it. After the receipt of the second premium we received the claim. We made inquiries, but everything seemed regular. We trusted to those local doctors—a system I have always set my face against. It was, of course, a damaged Life at the beginning.”

“But when I knew her,” said Miss Manuel, “she was quite healthy and quite strong. O, it must have been a sudden thing, I assure you. Poor Mrs. Carter!”

This was the third time she had called the deceased lady “poor,” and Mr. Speedy looked at her a little earnestly. The bright lady looked at him unsuspiciously. (“There was something in her eyes,” said Mr. Speedy, at dinner that day, pursuing his narrative to Mrs. Speedy, “about her eyes so strange and odd.”) He looked round to see were the clerks listening. Suddenly the doors were flapping like heavy mahogany wings, and a gay gentleman came up—to be reflected in the world of mahogany.

“Well! here I have come again,” he said.

"You can't tire me. A large stock of patience on hand—a reserve fund, like yours."

Miss Manuel turned round and knew the voice. "Major Carter!" she said. It was Major Carter, but he was altered. The gay young manner, which lay on him like a bloom, was dried off; he was not so bright, or, perhaps, so clean, and he had a sharper and more earnest manner. He started with astonishment and some confusion as he saw her and Mr. Speedy bent together over the counter.

"Miss Manuel!" he said. "So glad. Been well, I hope? But—er—why *here*?" he added, with a sort of sneering tone. "Ladies don't go round to Life offices as they do shopping, eh?"

Mr. Speedy, who had been scanning him coldly, and did not relish his interview being interrupted, said now: "It is no use coming until the full board meets again. I told you so, Major Carter, before."

"O, quite right, quite right," he said, hastily; "I was only passing, and looked in. And so *you* are at this sort of thing? And why the 'Irrefragable?' No better office, of course, he added, hastily. "It is melancholy to be obliged to think

of such things, and to have vile profit associated with those whose memory we love. But what can you do? Grown up sons, Miss Manuel, and a *little* extravagant. Ah, *I* can't treat myself to such a pure luxury as feeling."

Miss Manuel was looking at him steadily. "I was sorry to hear it," she said, "very sorry. So sudden, too. It must have been a great trial."

"It *was* a blow," he said, "a trial to us all. But, after all, we were prepared for it. She had been ailing a long time; O dear yes! That is," he added, hastily, "when I say a long time, I mean within a year. You are now in town? Ah, *so* glad! After all, poor Eastport; though, indeed, I know it brought us all our troubles. Indeed I felt for you. Must go now. Good-by. Morning, Mr. Speedy!"

With lip that fluttered nervously, the bright lady looked after him as the heavy door swung to and fro, as it were, in a rage. For a quarter of an hour more she and Mr. Speedy talked together; then the brougham drove away. As she swept round the corner, she saw the figure of Major Carter looking about cautiously. Her face flashed up. "It is beginning. It is coming!" she said.

"In time the Lord will deliver them all into my hands. It is written on his face."

There *was* something written on Major Carter's face—at least, a different writing from the old light and careless hand familiar to all at Eastport. There, every day, a hundred gay little "devices," as airy and nonsensical as the mottoes in bon-bons, were to be read. Now, there was a serious "legend," written in contracted characters. He turned away hastily when he saw her.

She went home in a sort of elation. Life was beginning to have a zest. Often and often there had come great gaps and blanks, when all hope and interest, and even consciousness of life, had left her; when time and life and the gay things of the gay world round her, seemed only a long white monotonous reformatory gallery, with barred grates and windows—as dreary, as hopeless, as prostrating. She had nothing to live for. She was oppressed with the chilling blankness of loneliness. But *now* she was beginning to apprehend life, and the scattered objects of life were striking on her senses, for she was living, breathing, and moving towards a purpose.

As she drove up to her own door

d a

figure standing on the steps. It was Fermor—the outlawed Fermor, as he almost seemed to be now. This image fitted harmoniously with all that was in her mind. *He* saw her drive up with one of his bitter “sore” smiles upon his mouth.

“I should have come a little later,” he said, “and been received with the usual answer. The next thing, I suppose, will be, you will tell me with your own lips that you are not at home.”

“The Lord,” thought the inner Miss Manuel again, “will in full time deliver all into my hands.” But the outer Miss Manuel, leaning on his arm to get out of her carriage, said, with bright eyes and soft encouragement, “I can see you are aggrieved about something. Come in. No, I know you will not. I must be punished and made to feel.”

Fermor walked up-stairs after her. She was never looking more dazzling than at that moment. What she had been thinking of had sent additional sparkles from her eyes. She was thinking how fast the fly was coming to the web—coming, too, of its own wish not to be kept out from the web with a foolish eagerness to be caught. To *him*, this brilliance—a brilliance set off by dress, and choice of colour in dress—was almost confounding; and

the feeling in his mind was a secret wonder how *this* had never struck him before in the old East-port days. As he sat opposite to her on Mr. Romaine's "low chair," he looked and looked again, and marvelled at what cloud had been between *his* eyes and her.

He was full of his grievances, and ready with indignant protest; but, as he looked, he began to soften. They fell into the category of those little outrages and insults which were a delightful and welcome little armoury for him in drawing-rooms.

"I am getting so used," he said, plaintively, "to hard knocks from all sides, that nothing comes upon me now as a surprise. I am persecuted for justice' sake. You, of course, only follow the crowd."

"Yes," said she, gaily, "I am now of the world, worldly. It is the only true course. Sentiment, scruples, delicacy, consideration, and the rest of it, is all waste of time and unprofitable. *À la guerre, comme à la guerre.* In the world, why not *as* the world?"

"Just what I thought," he said. "I have not lost my old power of judgment, though I suppose people say it is dulled. You are now sought and

courted, and I suppose flattered. Every one that comes, pays, I suppose, for his welcome by some coin of this sort. You relish it every day more and more, and do not care for those who come unfurnished, or do not care to furnish themselves. I am not skilled in *that* sort of thing. *Once*, perhaps, I could do it as well as any of them."

Her eyes fell on the ground. Her voice became low, and soft, and plaintively musical. "I thought *you* understood me. You, who know the world by heart, should make allowance for some of that rouge and patches which we must all put on. *Once*, indeed, I knew life, and fell into its ways, but that was long, long ago, down at poor East-port."

His eyes fell on the carpet too. "Ah! I begin to think those were very happy times," he said, sighing; "happier than will soon come again." He did not see how she was looking at him, nor did he know how she was thinking how much faster Nemesis was walking than she had calculated. "Yes," he went on, "I often think of it—I do indeed—of your pleasant home, and the life we spent together." (He, in fact, often did, for there had been an excitement and uncertainty in

the life, which had made it adventurous and agreeable to think of.) "I do not expect that you have yet learned to judge me fairly, but you will in time, I am sure."

A pang shot across her face. "Of course," she said, hastily. "As I said, we were all victims of circumstances. I could make allowance. I saw what engines were set at work. Someway, I cannot bring myself to talk of these things with the quiet indifference I ought. But every day I am learning, and *shall* learn. The world is a delightful master."

"I like to talk of old times," he said; "it has a sort of soothing effect. At home they do not understand these things. I can get no one to understand them. Practically, I am a stranger there. *You* understand me. I should like now and again to talk with you over such matters. But they are too pastoral and unsubstantial. The worldlings, it seems, and the flatterers, have stronger claims."

He was determined to force himself into the web. His foot was on the outer thread.

"How you misjudge me," she said, in the sweet key her voice sometimes sang in. "I am as you

—we are strangely like—lost in a crowd of friends who are not friends. There is a tumultuous crowd pressing round me, and yet I am alone—as if I was in a desert. These pleasant airy chattering men, so light and gay, what do you suppose *they* can do but chill my heart? With you I could have sympathy. We are in the same tone. I could gradually come to know you better and better, and find a soothing comfort, as you say, in talking over old times, but—but——”

Greatly interested, Fermor said, hastily, “But what—why not tell me?”

She shook her head. “No, no; I have reasons. Better for me to keep in my present groove—go on as I have gone on. Forgetfulness, coldness, heartlessness, indifference—these are the medicines for me. I should have nothing near me like sympathy, manliness, generosity, love, nor appreciation. No, no. Now you will understand what seemed ungracious—what you took for barring of doors against you! I thought you would have understood me better. So, I say, better cross over the street, and leave me on my own pathway.”

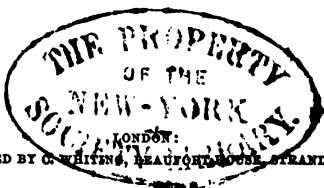
Bewildered by this speech, and strangely interested, Fermor was not ready with a reply.

Suddenly came pouring in the hollow world, the pleasant set who sat round Miss Manuel: critics, biographers, bishops, wits, and the rest.

He went his way in a strange exhilaration. After all, here was the old charm at work still. There was something strangely piquant about her. She made him talk as others did not make him talk. She was full of genius, and of the dramatic sense.

But there was a soft mystery about her last words—a pleasant confusion—above all, a compliment to *him*, in that persistent exclusion, that was welcome. He was pleased to find himself “rehabilitated,” and he walked home with dreams floating before him—the old dreams of vanity and complacency. Work had been resumed with the censers.

END OF VOL. II.



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